



Come unto me all ye that
labour & are heavy laden.
and I will give you rest.



J. Scotin. junior. sculp.

M. de Vos. inv.

M O R A L
REFLECTIONS
O N
SELECT PASSAGES
O F T H E
NEW TESTAMENT:

Divided into PORTIONS for
Every Sunday throughout the Year.

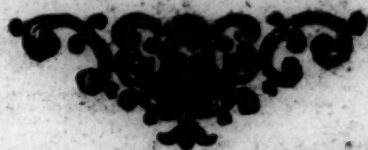
F O R T H E
U S E o f F A M I L I E S.

Written by the AUTHOR of
THE GENTLEMAN INSTRUCTED.

(Mr. Darrell)

In Two VOLUMES.

VOLUME I.



L O N D O N:

Printed for W. BICKERTON, at *Lord Bacon's Head*,
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THE
PUBLISHER
TO THE
READER.

HE Author of the following performance having apologized, in his Preface, for the introducing a new book of devotion into the world, from the consideration of that curiosity, so natural to the mind of man, and accompanying even piety itself, which nothing but novelty can satisfy; I might spare my self the trouble of an address to the reader, had I not a farther reason to give the world, for presenting it with this piece of our Author's; which is, its superior excellency

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cellency to most books of this kind, that have hitherto appear'd.

The pious Author's design is, to awake mankind to a sense of religion and virtue; and this he has endeavour'd to do in so masterly a manner, in such lively strains of devotion, with such a glowing warmth of expression, and such strong and forcible touches of religious Rhetorick, that I persuade myself, the truly serious and devout Christian will feel a sensible pleasure in reading the work; and if the Libertine will but afford it the least degree of attention, perhaps the religious fire, that glows in every page, may catch his heart, and melt it into virtue.

The character of the Author himself is so well establish'd by another admired performance,* that I may be excused from saying any thing upon that subject: besides, it is so well drawn by Dr. *Hickes*, who publish'd that work, that nothing can be added, to finish the Portrait of the great *Eusebius*.

* *The Gentleman instructed.*

I shall only take the liberty, upon this occasion, of *unmasking Eusebius*, and acquainting the Reader, that his true name was *Darrell*; that he was of the very ancient family of *Darrell*, of *Cale-hill*, in the County of *Kent*; and that he was a *Roman Catholick*. But, that the Author's religion may not lie in the way of *Protestants*, as an objection to the reading of his works, it must be observed, that the subjects, he treats of, are merely of a *moral* nature, and such as are common to both persuasions, being intended, not to inform the Reader's understanding, or instruct him in matters of faith, but to animate his piety, and draw him, by the strongest motives, to the practice of religion and virtue.

The Reader will presently perceive, that this work was intended as a *moral Comment* on the *Epistles* and *Gospels* for every *Sunday* throughout the year; but it being drawn up according to the *Romish Ritual*, which does not exactly (tho' it does pretty nearly) correspond with our own *Liturgy*, I

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thought it necessary to alter the Title, at the same time that I preserved the form and method of the work.

I have only to wish, and beg of God, that it may contribute to the *revival* of piety, and virtue, in this age of libertinism and irreligion; as one means towards which desirable end, under the good Providence of God, I heartily recommend it to the Publick.

T. B.





THE P R E F A C E.



Am sensible the world is so stock'd with books of devotion, as well as with prophane; that, if the mode of writing continues, the catalogue of authors may vie with the number of readers.

Did men read good books merely for instruction; first to learn, then to practise their duty; not to become more learned, but more virtuous; new treatises on the subject of religion might appear superfluous.

But alas! the same books, which were a-la-mode last year, are out of fashion this; and those, that once charmed the reader, in process of time, like almanacks out of date, lie buried in dust and oblivion. All human things are in a perpetual motion: like the sun they have their Rise, their Meridian, and their West.

Our judgments and appetites vary, and are seldom constant in anything but change.

Nay, Men are now come to such an excess of delicacy, that they regale their very souls with new ragousts, as well as their palates: nothing spiritual will go down, unless novelty recommends it. The most solid piety is always attended with some curiosity; and nothing conveys more effectually good instructions, than variety.

I condescend to your inclination, to conquer your passions; and strike in with one disease, to cure another. I therefore offer to your perusal these Moral Reflections on Select Passages of the New Testament. The thoughts, I must own, are vulgar, as well as the expressions; for I pretend not to be admired, but understood: you will meet with nothing extraordinary, but plainness: and I confess, it is unfurnish'd of all advantage, but that the book is new.

However, I have laid open so fully your duty, the advantages of an exact compliance, and the severe punishments of transgressors; that you may not plead ignorance of your obligation, or want motives to fulfil it. You will see the law you must be try'd by at your deaths, as well as that you must live by; and how prodigiously your practice falls short of your obligation: how earnestly it commands virtue, and how boldly you plunge into vice: what happiness attends a godly life; what torments a bad one: in fine, how little unfortunate man seems concern'd at Christ's menaces, or moved with his promises; as if those were only intended

intended to fright, and these to please. And then certainly, if we will but take the pains to compare our present enjoyments with the expectation of the future, the vast recompence of a good life with the severe chastisements of a bad one; we may either be allured to the practice of virtue, or scar'd out of the love of vice: besides, the press spreads infection through the whole nation; and you take in the poison with pleasure and transport.

Some vent downright blasphemies, under the disguise of pretended demonstrations, against the Trinity: with Arius, they laugh at the mystery, because they cannot understand it. Others strike at the soul's immortality; and endeavour to convince you, that you die like beasts, to persuade you to copy their lives. Nay, one has the confidence to prove mortality no punishment of sin, but of infidelity: as if a man could believe death out of the world, and protract his life in sæcula sæculorum, in spite of him who gave it.*

Seeing therefore such a tide of bad books flows in upon us, good ones may take the same liberty: and as numbers have debauch'd our manners, why may not numbers reform them? I suppose Christians are not yet so deeply engaged in an alliance against Christ's commands, as to refuse all articles of accommodation. They are not so fond of damnation, as to fly in the face of a friend, who endea-

* I suppose the author means Mr. Aſgil, who pretended, that, if a man had faith, he would never die, but be translated alive to heaven.

vours to avert it : nor so irreconcilably fallen out with religion and piety, as not to bear what can be pleaded in their favour. In the time of pestilence, no man complains of a friend, for proposing too many preservatives : when the danger is evident, prudence requires a suitable precaution. Now, there are so many contagious books, that their titles infect the streets, and it is less dangerous to enter into a pest-house, than to come within sight of a bookseller's shop, if curiosity accompany you. I have therefore thought fit to throw in a good title amongst so many bad ones ; that the antidote may be near the poison ; and the cure as ready at hand as the infection.

I present you therefore these Moral Reflections on Select Passages of the New Testament ; that is, a moral comment on the Scripture. I pretend not to publish a new morality, but to explain that of Jesus Christ : and, as I disclaim a criminal indulgence on the one hand, so I disapprove too morose a severity on the other. I am far from being inclined to damn all, nor yet of the opinion to save all. Heaven's gate is strait, but not wall'd up : few enter, but all may ; in fine, the conquest of heaven is hard, but not impossible. It may be stormed, and the violent take it by force, Matth. xi. 12. but it cannot be taken by capitulation. So that we must neither despair of success, nor temerarily presume.

Some may perchance object, that I often repeat the same things : but, first, if Atheists and Libertines gain ground upon religion, and
virtue,

virtue, by repeated attacks; if they weary people out of their duty by importunity, and force them to yield in their own defence; why may not I manage the interest of virtue by the same method, and foil its enemies at their own weapons? Men may be importuned into heaven, as well as into hell: at least, the importance of the concern deserves the experiment. But besides, we cannot hear too often those things, which we cannot too perfectly learn: our salvation depends on the practice, and this on the knowledge of our duty: so that if the vastness of Christ's promises ballance the difficulty of the practice, the profit of the knowledge will atone for the frequency of the repetition. In a word, we cannot hear bad things too seldom, nor good too often.

I therefore desire the Christian Reader, if he intends to profit by these reflections, to carry about him this capital point of his religion, that he was made for heaven, by God's goodness; but that his own malice may plunge him into hell: he walks between two extremes; both eternal, both different; the one of pleasure, the other of punishment: he may choose either; both he cannot; one he must; for there is no other state eternal for those, who once have used reason: the choice must be made in this world: when our glass is run, and our last breath has pass'd our lips, nothing remains but reward or punishment, and both everlasting: it will be in vain to see our folly, when there is no possibility of amendment.

Fix therefore this great truth in your mind, that you are made for heaven; to labour here, and to enjoy your Maker eternally hereafter. This is the basis of all our hopes, and ought to be the end of all our actions. The Scripture declares it in a hundred places, and the whole series of our stupendous redemption supposes it. Nay, the very incapacity of all sublunary things, to satiate the vast desires of a human heart, teaches us, that our final content dwells in a higher region; and consequently, that whosoever seeks it in this world, will in the end meet with nothing but disappointment. Our salvation therefore is our grand concern, because it is the very end of our creation; for what deserves the name of a matter of concern, but that, on which depends a great advantage, or an excessive damage? Now what can we hope for in this world comparable to the enjoyment of God? Or what can we fear, that bears any equality with the torments of hell? Between things finite and infinite, there is no proportion.

Tho' we take false measures in the management of temporal concerns, future care may retrieve a past misfortune: wisdom bought at our own expence is generally more useful, than that we receive from nature, or instruction. In a word, if bad success attend one enterprise, good may crown the second. Fortune grows weary of persecuting her enemies, no less than of favouring her friends: her frowns are as short-lived as her smiles; so that, as no man can expect a continual train of prosperity,

prosperity, he ought not to apprehend a constant adversity. But tho' all the evils, that ever befall the whole species, were concenter'd in the same person; if (in the end) he saves his soul, he must be pronounc'd happy; for those must expire with his last breath; but salvation is happiness above imagination, and (what enhances its value) without end.

But on the other side, tho' we sparkle in silk, and glitter in silver; if we die the death of the rich glutton, and change our stately palace for a grave in hell, what will our past titles and equipage avail us? Shall we be less miserable, because once we were happy? Alas! nothing sinks deeper into the hearts of the damn'd, than the sad remembrance, that once they might have been happy.

Remind those unfortunate creatures (the world was pleas'd to stile witty and prudent) of their vast achievements, will they not confess, those encomiums were ill placed? Seeing they have neglected their great concern, and wearied themselves in trifles, which they might have wanted without disadvantage, and could not purchase without pain? Seeing they forgot the only business, that deserved their thoughts and required their application? The doleful burthen of their eternal lamentation demonstrates, that the title of folly suits better with their conduct, than that of prudence; and that they fling up all claim to the elogium of wits, to take that of madmen. We fools counted their life madness, *Wisd. v. 4.* Fools that we were! with what an air of assurance

rance did we laugh at those (as men, without brains, without reason) who made the purchase of heaven their business, and a happy eternity the subject of their sollicitude? Who contemned temporal concerns, as trivial and childish, below the care of a wise man, and the very thoughts of a Christian? How are they reckon'd among the children of God, ver. 5. Oh! how the scene is changed! Their folly has raised them above the stars, and our topping parts have plunged us below the center; they sing eternal Alleluia's in the choirs of the blessed, whilst we sigh and lament among the damned: therefore have we gone astray. The conclusion is admirable, but it comes too late; tho' the damned are excellent Logicians, they will remain bad Christians to all eternity.

Our salvation is not only our greatest concern, but our only concern. We have no business in this world, but to secure our happiness in the next: God had no other design in our creation, but our felicity and his own glory. For this end he endowed us with an understanding to know him, and with a will to love him. Our only business therefore is, to tend to this end, and all those actions, that took another way, are excentrical. My business is not to sit at the helm of the government, to make a figure in the world, to purchase titles, or buy lordships; but to save my soul; and if I save it, I have answered the end of my creation, tho' I live in poverty, and die in contempt. But if I damn it, tho' I gain

gain the world, I have done nothing. For, in fine, I have only done, what I should not have done, and have neglected what I should not have deferred one moment; so that I have been laboriously idle.

Again, our salvation is our business alone, because it is in our power alone to purchase it. We can strike up bargains, and make contracts, by proxy; but all men must work out their salvation in person: for, as the enjoyment of God is personal, so is the deserving of this blessing also; and, as no man is damned but for his own sins, so no man will be saved but for his own virtues.

In fine, it is our only business, because on this alone depends eternity: other concerns look not beyond time. Grandeur and wealth, and the whole train of temporal advantages, cannot out-live some few years; but this looks into eternity: it passes with us into the other world, and only begins when life ends. In a word, this is the One thing necessary of all men: they may be happy without title or escutcheon, without beauty or applause; but cannot without the enjoyment of God.

I doubt not, dear Reader, but you believe these truths. But, alas! all the damn'd souls are of the same persuasion; they believed, as we do; and by misfortune we live, as they did: and as our lives resemble theirs, God send our death proves not a copy of theirs. If you intend to profit, leave the bare theory to come to practice. The Pagan philosophers composed as fine panegyricks of virtue, as Christians: but
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the practice of virtue renders us virtuous, not the knowledge. What signifies it to know the way to heaven, unless we walk in it? To believe we were made for God, unless our works answer our belief? Let therefore this prime article influence your whole conduct, and that it may more forcibly work upon you, have it always in view. I have a soul to save, and this is my great, nay, my only concern. If I bring this to a happy issue, I am made for ever; if I miscarry, all is lost for eternity; for who can be more happy, than he who enjoys God; or who more miserable, than he who feels the flames of Hell?



T H E



M O R A L
REFLECTIONS
O N
SELECT PASSAGES
O F T H E
NEW TESTAMENT.

EPISTLE to the Romans, Chap. xiii. Verse

11. *And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now is our salvation nearer than when we believ'd.*

12. *The night is far spent, the day is at hand; let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.*

13. *Let us walk honestly as in the day, not in rioting and drunkenness, nor in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying.*

14. *But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof.*

The MORAL REFLECTION.



THE apostle, in this chapter to the new converted Romans, runs through the fundamental points of christian morality; obedience to princes, charity to our neighbour; and then he lays down a catalogue of those things they must avoid, and of those they must practise, if they intend to square their lives by the saving precepts of their profession; and he assures them, the holiness of their manners must answer the sanctity of their belief; that they must abjure the false maxims of paganism together with the religion; and practise what *Christ* commanded, as well as believe what he revealed.

Now it is high time (O Romans) to awake out of sleep; (that is) to shake off that fatal lethargy, that has laid you in a trance, since the foundation of your empire. You must reverse those lewd principles, ignorance framed, and paganism brought into reputation and credit: For now is our salvation nearer, than when we believed. For since the Son of God has sanctified the world by his life, and ransomed it by his death; our salvation is nearer, than when we believed he would come, and reinstate us in those pretensions to heaven, which our first parents disobedience forfeited.

Cast off therefore the works of darkness: Those corrupt maxims and worse practices of your pagan ancestors; and shew you are christians by living up to your profession. First, detest those brutalities nature condemns and idolatry canonizes; for though they are worshipp'd in your temples, they will be punish'd in hell. And when you are clear of vice, employ all your care to acquire those virtues Christ taught

taught by his practice, and commands in his gospel :
Put on our Lord Jesus Christ.

This advice of the apostle's is no less proper for the eighteenth than the first age of christianity. We are no less careless in the business of our salvation than they: We live, as if we hoped no future reward for a good life, nor feared any after-reckoning for a bad one. We copy their vices, and even out-do the originals: but then no foot-steps of their virtues are visible in our conduct. So that our crimes are without any allay, as well as without precedent. The prospect of any temporal advantage keeps us awake; it rouses our care, and puts all our spirits in a ferment. We lose the enjoyment of what we possess, to enter upon the possession of what we desire. We weary ourselves in the pursuit, and importune others: the new flush'd game runs away with our thoughts and our satisfaction: it puts us on the rack, and conjures up the passions of hope and fear, to torment us. In fine, one would think mens souls were no less mortal than those of beasts; their thoughts fix so naturally on matter: as if their whole concern lay in this world, and that they had no interest in the other.

Talk to them of the other world, they understand not the language: they are as great strangers to the dialect, as Joseph was to that of the Egyptians. One would take them for men dropp'd from the sphere of the moon, or lately come from the wilds of America; without instruction, and almost without reason. Intent upon the present, they spend not one serious thought upon the concerns of the future. As if they disbelieved such a state, or that an eternal happiness or misery were either infallible, or impossible.

This being too literally true, dear christian, give me leave to tell you, with St. Paul; it is high time to rise from this sleep of insensibility, and to

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lay to heart a matter that so nearly concerns you. What! To believe a hell, and to live as if there were no such place of torments! To confess there is a heaven, and to act as if it were only fable and romance! Is it not stupendous in theory, though too visibly true in practice? Bid adieu to this fatal indolence, and take up a resolution worthy of your profession. You are not in the sad circumstances of so many infidels, who, having but a very imperfect view of the other world, confine their fear and hope to this.

Nor do we believe, with the Jews, that God will send us a Messias to unlock heaven gates, and to plain the way by his law and example. *Our salvation is nearer than when we believed.* Those ages of expectation are past. God has fulfilled his promise, and Christ the office of Redeemer: his religion stretches as wide as the inhabited world. He has drawn out a lively scheme of the other world: he gives us a fair prospect of heaven, and a frightful landscape of hell. He has discovered the vanity of temporal things, and the real value of those that are eternal. In fine, he has chalk'd out the way to bliss in his gospel, and plain'd it by his example. So that as the knowledge of our duty and of our reward is more distinct, than that of the ancients, and the means more proper, our negligence is less pardonable, and consequently more criminal.

Seeing the night of ignorance is past, and the day of knowledge, so long promised, and so passionately longed for, is come, let us take leave of all those shameful actions that fly the sun, and seek a cover in darkness and obscurity; that strike us with horror, though not with aversion, and force us to blush, though not to repent.

Put on the armour of light; practise virtue. It is the child of light, that is, of grace and faith. It fears

fears not day, and scorns darkness. It dreads not a witness. Good men dare own it; and even bad men esteem it. It stands the test of criticism, and pleads for a reward at God's tribunal.

Let us walk honestly as in the day. Our actions must be such, as neither fear company, nor censure: such as we not only dare confide to the privacy of a friend, but expose to the view of an enemy; such as a criminal may stand to at the bar, and act in the face of the court. For God will be judge, as he is witness, of your behaviour. He reads your thoughts, and surveys your actions. And as he will certainly reward your virtues, he will as infallibly punish your vices.

And therefore, as children of light, scorn to give up your reason to appetite, and to place your happiness in the felicity of beasts: eat and drink, to sustain nature, not to pamper it; to preserve life, not to destroy it. Necessity requires little: nothing satiates gluttony and intemperance. Seeing we cannot be dispensed from these actions of beasts, let us at least do them like men with moderation. To fling away estates upon cooks and vintners, is to sell heaven for wine and ragoos, as Esau did his birth-right for a mess of pottage.

As the apostle commands sobriety, so he does chastity, and forbids severely all those acts that cross upon this angelical virtue. Although God by the mouth of his prophets has thundred out a thousand curses against this detestable sin; although he has drowned once the world, together with its impure inhabitants, and consumed five cities with fire and brimstone, and threatens the luxurious with everlasting flames; yet, in spite of preaching and punishment, it dares appear, though not without shame, yet without remorse, and even almost without reproof, in Christendom. From the city, it has made a progress into the country, and infects the

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peasantry, as well as the nobility. Other sins are but personal ; but this takes in the whole species ; so that all are guilty, as well as the Sodomites. Who would not think, that chastity and uncleanness had changed places in the opinion of christians ; that this was a virtue, that a vice ; this commanded, that forbid, under pain of God's high displeasure ?

Could diffuse repeal divine or natural laws, as well as human, *Thou shalt not commit adultery*, would be of no force. But alas ! neither time nor custom can plead prescription against God and nature. The law was writ in our hearts before it was engraven on a table of stone. It came into the world with our creation, and binds eternally : those, who transgress it, shall never pass from this sensual paradise of Mahomet into that of Jesus Christ. Number will not (as in rebellions against princes) plead for impunity : nor quality, nor youth, nor all those specious covers, men throw over the sin, to conceal its Foulness, and their own guilt.

One would wonder by what fatal charms it has gained so much ground in the world ; and why reasonable creatures will buy one drop of honey, dash'd with gall and wormwood, at the price of health, estate, honour, contentment, and, in the end, of heaven too. I say, one drop : for though this vice, mask'd under the disguise of a Platonic amour, appears with a pleasing aspect in fable and romance ; in life and practice, it is waited on by all the torments of the damn'd, but that of eternity. For a person, possess'd by the unclean devil Asmodeus, burns with heat, and shivers with cold : He swells with rage, and sinks into despair. Jealousy stabs him ; and a thousand suspicions throw his heart on the tenters. In fine, to conclude with St. Jerome, (Lib. 2. adv. Jovin.) *Love and folly go hand in hand. It is a passion that never lodges at the sign of health : it burns the brain : it makes a man stupid,*
unfit

unfit for all things, and in the end even for love itself.

But what is yet worse, this cursed passion seems (even in this world) to stamp a visible mark of reprobation on the foreheads of those, who sin rather by profession than out of frailty. For a continual commerce with flesh turns the very reason of the sinner into sensuality. He becomes stupid, and brutal; repents of his folly, without being sorry for his crimes; detests his chains, yet will not resolve to break them. So, like the devils, he undergoes all the trouble of a true repentance, and suffers all the torments of a false one.

What remedy for a vice so prevailing? *First*, Beg of God that he will fortify the weakness of nature by the strength of his grace. Without this, you can do nothing; and with it you are half omnipotent. Poor St. Austin, when he felt the strength of concupiscence, and was a stranger to the force of grace, found only eyes to see his crimes, but not a heart to forsake them. He thought uncleanness necessary, and chastity impossible: but when he had read this very place of St. Paul, and felt the strong impulse of interior grace; he found by experience, it is far more easy to live in continency, than to satisfy sensuality. And as he found a pleasure, where he expected a torment, we have reason to hope for the same favour, if we ask it with fervour, humility, and perseverance. *2dly*, Fly the occasion; other vices are conquered by combat, this by flight. You may as well pretend to freeze in fire, or to burn in a congealed lake, as to stand undefiled in the midst of danger. If you dote on a creature, nothing can break the charm, or cure the dotage, but separation; when you are out of the reach of an ill action, you are almost out of the danger of sin. *But oh! one day's absence will seem*

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a year. Separate notwithstanding, and in time a year will not seem a day.

Ah, dear christian, is it not better to divorce from the company of a wretched creature for some years, than from the enjoyment of God for ever?

3dly, Have no familiarity with the sex: tho' you intend no harm, the devil does: those very conversations you entertain for a mere pastime, he will improve to your ruin. Nature has a terrible bent to evil; it is hard to restrain its sallies: and if the devil adds a byass, they are almost irresistible. Familiarity will soon shoot up to esteem, and then love follows. And when this tyrant has tied their hearts, impurity seals the engagement.

In fine, if you avoid this sin, the other precept of the apostle, *But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ*, will easily be put in execution. We shall square our lives by his model, that is, by the practice of all those virtues he recommended by his example, and commanded by his apostles.

Oh! my dear Redeemer, seeing thou hast taken my flesh, to die for my sins, and to merit my salvation, it is time to thank you for the favour. Insensible of your kindness, and forgetful of my interest, I have slept in sin, and gloried in my iniquities: I have done just what you forbid, and neglected what you command: but now thy mercy has awaked my negligence, and thy vast promises raised a firm resolution to secure my soul (as much as this region of uncertainties will permit) by those virtues, which will give me content in this world, and, if waited on with perseverance, eternal glory in the next.

GOSPEL

GOSPEL of St. Luke, Chap. xxi. Verse

25. *And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring;*

26. *Mens hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things, which are coming on the earth; for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.*

27. *And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.*

28. *And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh.*

29. *And he spake to them a parable; behold the fig-tree, and all the trees;*

30. *When they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves, that summer is now nigh at hand.*

31. *So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand.*

32. *Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled:*

33. *Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.*

The MORAL REFLECTION.

SAINTE Luke in this chapter sets down a dismal account of the great assize at the last day, together with the preliminaries: and he, who can read the whole without agony and convulsion, must either disbelieve the text, or have lost both sense and reason.

First, He gives us a catalogue of those dreadful prodigies that will preface the approach of this fatal

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tal day, that must decide whether we shall burn eternally with the devils below, or sing never ending alleluia's with the saints and angels above.

The heavens will open the first scene of this amazing tragedy. *And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars.* And altho' our blessed Saviour does not specify, in this place, the nature of the signs: yet, in another, he assures us, the sun shall change his glittering beams into more than Egyptian darkness, and bury the world in horror and obscurity. The moon, that gilds the shades of night, shall put on a bloody veil, and all the stars, that now delight the eye with so glorious a prospect, shall put on the frightful shapes of blazing comets. In a word; *The powers of heaven shall be shaken*, and all nature tremble. The elements, that have contributed to mens sins, shall now revenge the affront by contributing to their punishment. The air will flame with lightening, and echo with peals of thunder. The sea will foam with fury, and swell its raging billows above the tops of mountains. The earth will tremble under our feet. What wonder then, when every object throws before us prospects of horror, and represents death under the most ghastly dress, *mens hearts fail them for fear* of present evils, and stand congealed with the expectation of future calamities.

If the irregular motion of one disordered element oftentimes scares people out of their wits, and turns their imaginations into real executioners: what fear and amazement shall a general mutiny of every part of the universe cause? When God shall repeal the common laws of nature, and exert his power to produce astonishing meteors in the heavens, and strange throws and convulsions on earth! What thoughts shall men have in this dreadful agony of nature? Alas! They shall die in fancy a thousand times before they die indeed, and call upon death

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as a less evil, than the continual fear of dying. Other misfortunes overlook some; but here all are equally engaged. As none are free, so none are able either to encourage or comfort their companions; nay, the misery of each rebounds on all, so that every man groans under his own fear, and carries that of his neighbour. Commerce and conversation will give place to terror. Cities will be turned into desarts, and caves into cities. The rich usurer shall forget his wealth, the lady her beauty, the prince his state, and the beggar his poverty. The common calamity shall take away all the distinguishing prerogatives of birth and title, and seat the king and the subject on the same level. In fine, nature must die, and these dire symptoms and convulsions must lay it in the grave: time must be no more: it must stop to make room for eternity.

Tell me not, all these frightful prodigies concern not you: that the world is longer lived than our age, and that you shall end before time expires. But mistake not, dear reader: they regard all mankind, and Christ has revealed those truths, to teach us the enormity of sin, and the vanity of all earthly toys, that run away with our hearts, and at last plunge our souls into an abyss of misery. For how detestable must sin be in the sight of God, seeing he purges with fire all those innocent parts of nature, that man's malice has made subservient to his offences? and that he has doomed the world to so strange a death, because we have forced it to concur to our excesses? If God punishes sinners so severely, to fright them to repentance, what pangs, what throws will the impenitent feel? If divine justice, soften'd by the indulgence of an infinite mercy, be so superlatively rigorous; how will it rage, when guided by anger, and inflam'd by revenge.

But besides, as this catastrophe of the world lays before us a scene of horror, so it opens a lively prospect

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prospect of our folly ; for it tears off that gaudy vizard, that veiled an empty nothing under a dazzling surface, that charmed our senses, to steal our hearts ; and put upon us painted pleasures for solid happiness. To shew therefore, for how short lived felicities we barter eternal joys ; God has condemned to death the great world as well as the little ; both are dust, and to dust both must return. Our ambition, at the price of a thousand crimes, would fain survive the grave, and live in the memory of after-ages : though mortal, we affect immortality, and a life by proxy, and at second hand, in spite of nature. But, alas ! we build castles in the air ; nothing done in this world is permanent ; but vice or virtue, all must bend to time, and this must expire together with the world, and all we leave behind. So that earthly goods are vain : all we have possessed are flown away, and those we leave behind are posting after. Rise by your valour from the sheepcote to the throne ; erect a thousand pyramids to eternise your memory ; buy the pens of historians, the rhetoric of orators, and the muses of the poets ; leave twenty heirs to propagate your family : time will overturn your pyramids, devour your books, put an end to your race : your name will lie buried under the ruins of time, together with the Babel of your grandeur ; and time itself will end in the fathomless ocean of eternity.

Why then do we squander away our time upon those toys, that cannot outlive time ? The time will come, when what we loved and feared here will be no more. Nay, we shall lie plunged in oblivion, as little known to those, who will follow us, as to those, who went before : our works alone will accompany us, either to plead for mercy at God's tribunal, or to call for revenge.

When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads ; for your redemption draw-
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eth nigh. Christ bids his disciples (and in them all the just) regard these prodigies, not as furies sent to torment them, but as friends to break their chains, as fore-runners of their eternal happiness: when wealth shall not purchase safety, nor policy contrive security; when fear shall damp the courage and pall the spirits of the heroes; virtue will embolden the just to contemplate the downfall of nature with a steadfast eye, and a fearless heart. The deluge of water spared Noah, who burned not with the fire of impure love; and this inundation of fire shall respect those, who burn with the flame of divine charity.

But all these calamities are only the beginning of those sad evils that await the wicked: Christ himself will put an end to the temporal punishments, to condemn them to those that are eternal, *and then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory*; that is, Christ will come to judge all the nations of the world, and to ratify by an irrevocable sentence the damnation of the wicked, and the salvation of the just: this truth is too clear to want a proof; the very Barbarians expect a future judgment, and nature has imprinted it in the bottom of our souls with such lasting characters, that forgetfulness is not able to deface them, nor impiety to blot them out. Revelation confirms this universal sentiment of nature; we must all appear at the bar of this great Judge, and receive from his mouth our final doom: either a *Come ye blessed*, or a *Depart ye cursed*: our thoughts, words and actions shall be exposed to the open view of heaven and earth, of the saints and angels, with all their aggravating circumstances; and those very crimes we blush'd to confess in private, shall be dragged upon this great theatre, to receive punishment and confusion. The damned shall be separated from the just. Into what throws, into what tormenting agonies will this preliminary cast the damned? What would your Cæsars or
Alexanders

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Alexanders give for the last place among the elect ? They lorded it in this world ; they waded through seas of blood to thrones and sceptres. They flung up their quiet, to climb above the heads of their fellow creatures. And what have they reaped from all their greatness, but a great abasement ? from their power, but a fatal prerogative of being more powerfully tormented ? Were repentance in this extremity significant, the vale of Jehosaphat would ring with ten millions of *Peccavi's*, and as many *Lord have mercy on me's*. But, alas ! the reign of mercy is expired, and justice alone sits on the bench ! There is no time for amendment, no place for favour. The judge is inexorable ; tears cannot bend him, nor entreaties soften him, nor sorrow melt him into compassion. But the most terrible circumstance of all is, that once he was our friend ; this character, that one would think should give confidence to the sinner, is the very thing that plunges him into despair ; the best things degenerate into the worst, when corrupted, and from a contemned love springs the most excessive hatred. Now Jesus Christ having stretched his love to man, almost as far as his omnipotence could carry it, and man ingratitude to the very extent of malice ; he will observe the same method in his hatred, and appear that day as excessive in rigour, as before in kindness.

And now, what plea can a wretched sinner make at a tribunal, before a Person who is both judge and plaintiff ? Alas ! he shall only run to (the last refuge of the unfortunate) tears ; and to the ordinary theam of the miserable, unprofitable wishes that he had never sinned, or that he had been so happy as to have repented.

Those that scorned to stoop to the humiliation of a private penance, shall undergo all the shame of a publick confession, without the satisfaction of pardon. Oh ! once merciful Redeemer, but now just Judge
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(will your beaux cry out) I confess my crimes, and the memory of my offences reads me a continual lesson of my ingratitude. I seldom closed my eyes, but to sleep myself sober ; and as seldom unclosed them, but to drown my reason again in wine, and to overcharge nature with banquets. My religion was to laugh at all, and comply with none, and my only piety to be superlatively impious. I went to church to multiply my sins, not to obtain pardon, and seldom prayed, but to meet a mistress ; I staid no longer, than I found company to talk profanely ; or to ridicule a peruke, or to censure a cravat-string. From the church I turned off to the tavern ; and then to places I dare not name. So that I employed all my time either in committing new sins, or boasting of old ones. And now, what remains but the sad thought, I might have been happy, and a sad assurance I must be miserable !

Ladies, who forget their souls to pamper their bodies, will echo forth this fruitless theme.

Oh God ! I ask no pardon, but am forced to submit to thy justice, though I dread it. Had I suffered for thy love what I have undergone to court the world, I should have found a seat among the blessed ; but now I can expect no other crown for my martyrdom than the punishment of my folly. One speck in my face cast me into convulsions, and a thousand scars in my soul never alarmed my fear, nor moved me to repentance. My intrigues aimed at the conquest of some gallant, and I pawned heaven to gratify a raving passion. My wicked intention died every ribbon with the colour of fire, and I might have discovered the face of a reprobate, had not my false glass deceived me. Thus men will melt into fruitless tears ; but they come too late to stop the course of justice.

Then will the judge say (the Scripture tells us) to those on his left hand, Depart from me ! O sweet Jesus !

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sus ! can thy compassionate heart pronounce so severe
 a sentence, *Depart* ? Whither shall those wretches
 go that depart from thee ? But go they must, and
accursed also ; nay, and into fire. O God ! must
 this pamper'd body lie stretched on a bed of fire ?
 Alas ! we are neither composed of iron nor steel,
 but of tender flesh and sensible arteries. One fit of
 the stone makes life a burthen, and of the gout a
 torment : we cannot endure the flame of a candle one
 minute ; how then shall we dwell with fire and brim-
 stone ? But we obey the sentence ; we accept the pu-
 nishment not only with joy, but even with transport,
 if once this fire will expire : but oh ! to depart from
 Thee *accursed*, and into fire, nay, and into eternal
 fire ! who can think of so strange a lot without hor-
 ror ? In this black cloud sets all the glory of the
 world. Her titles, amours, pleasures end, to enter
 upon torments above expression, and despair without
 end.

Dear reader, you believe this truth. Why then
 do you make no preparation for your trial ? or ra-
 ther, why do you increase the articles of your in-
 dictment ? as if you feared to be brought in, *not*
guilty, or placed your security in guilt, and your
 happiness in eternal misery. If you desire to appear
 at this bar without fear ; live without great sins, and
 repent of the less. Imagine with St. Jerome, you
 hear continually ring in your ears this terrible summons,
Arise ye dead, and come to judgment ! The securest
 way not to fear judgment, is always to apprehend it.
 Christ will not condemn him, who pronounces him-
 self guilty.

O God of mercy ! give me in this world a true
 notion of thy justice in the other. Assist me with thy
 grace, that I fall not into thy displeasure, or that I
 may be so fortunate as to rise. O let me live innocent,
 or at least die penitent. Pronounce not sentence a-
 gainst a soul, the price of thy blood, and once the
 object

object of thy love. Torment me in this world with *Job's leprosy*, and *Tobit's blindness*: only spare me in the next.

EPISTLE to the Romans, Chap. xv. Verse

4. For whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.

5. Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like-minded one towards another, according to Christ Jesus:

6. That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

7. Wherefore, receive ye one another, as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.

8. Now I say, that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers:

9. And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy, as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name.

10. And again he saith, Rejoice ye Gentiles with his people.

11. And again, Praise the Lord all ye Gentiles, and laud him all ye people.

12. And again Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles, in him shall the Gentiles trust.

13. Now the God of Hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the holy Ghost.

THE MORAL REFLECTION.

THE Apostle endeavours to compose some heats and differences, that arose between the Jewish and Pagan Converts: he tells them; Seeing
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18 MORAL REFLECTIONS

it has pleased God to call both to the faith and grace of Jesus Christ, they must shew their gratitude, by returning thanks for the favour, and live in peace like brethren, not in discord like aliens. And that his exhortation might make the stronger impression, he proposes Christ's example, *who did not please himself: but, as it is written, The rebukes of them that rebuked thee, are fallen upon me.* Psal. lxxix. 9. He laboured not for his own interest, but for his heavenly Father's glory, and for the salvation of men, though his enemies. For thus he embraced all the inconveniencies of an abject and penurious life, and suffered the torments of an ignominious and cruel death. And by this example, we are taught to love our neighbour, tho' he hates us, and to assist him (not out of any view of sordid interest) both with our purse and counsel, as much as our circumstances permit, and his exigencies require.

Whatsoever things were written, for our learning they are written. For all that the scripture contains, whether by way of precept or example, was penned for our instruction. That, to shew us the extent of our duty: this, as an incitement to fulfil it; that by the continual exhortations to virtue, and rare examples of patience, we may be animated to bend all our care to practise virtue in this world, and to hope for heaven in the next. Why has God drawn up such an exact scheme of his servant Job's life, and recommended it to posterity, but to set before us a lively pattern of patience in adversity, and of moderation in a smoother fortune? but to teach us, that good and evil come from the same hand, and that we must receive this without complaint, and that without pride? but to teach us, that he can raise the humble, and humble the proud, and will reward the resignation of the one, and crush the insolence of the other?

And

And, because the poison of original sin has tainted all the faculties of our soul, darkened the understanding, and congeal'd the will, and so rendered them unfit for the practice of christian virtues, unless they receive a supply of grace; the apostle besought God, to impart his divine assistance to the Romans: *The God of patience and consolation grant you to be like-minded one towards another, according to Jesus Christ, that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.* That they might keep up to the height of their profession by loving their neighbour, as Christ loved them; that is, by returning favours for affronts, and revenging all the evil they can suffer by all the good they can do.

And because this duty runs strong against the bias of depraved nature, we must make our addresses to God, who is able to remove the difficulty, or to give us force to master it; nay and will, if we take the pains to solicit his mercy with confidence and submission.

The reason why temptations triumph over our innocence, and we fall a sacrifice to the violence of flesh and blood, is, because we never think of imploring the succour of heaven. We lean violently to liberty: exterior objects play smoothly upon sense, and solicit the heart with a charming oratory: hence we fall into a fit of despondency, and imagine our passions as invincible, as the Israelites did the inhabitants of Canaan. * They are a race of giants, and we but grasshoppers. And thus magnifying and multiplying the difficulties, we sit down and are overcome, not for want of strength, but of care and prudence. For tho' indeed we are unable to subdue them with our own forces, we have an omnipotent ally to back us: and if we are so senseless, or so careless, as not to call upon him, our defeat must

* *There we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers.* Numb. xiii. 33.

lie at our own doors. Tho' his commands are impossible to nature, they are easy to grace. *My yoke is easy, and my burthen light.* And St. John, after a long trial, pronounced the same truth : * they are only hard to those, who lie drowned in sensuality, who sleep in sin, and fear to be awaked out of the pleasing lethargy.

Complain not therefore of the precept ; *Receive one another, as Christ also has received us.* Sacrifice all resentment to peace and charity : never think of affronts, but to pardon them : in fine, receive, that is, love all men without distinction, as Christ did, without any regard to flesh and blood, to country or religion. This universal love is a doctrine, neither taken from the Jews, nor borrowed of the Gentiles, but delivered by Jesus Christ, who redeemed both Jew and Gentile : those indeed, to fulfil the promise God made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob ; these, out of pure mercy : *For I say, that Christ Jesus was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers : and that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.*

And if you comply with this favourite precept of God, *made man* ; I may assure you, without playing the false prophet, first, that God will fill you with all joy. You will feel the satisfaction of having practised a virtue ; nay, and find less pain in composing discords, than in fomenting them. For it is certain, as pardon is more christian, so is it less troublesome, than revenge : and he suffers less, who forgets an injury, than he who stands upon the formality of satisfaction.

Secondly, you will *abound in hope*, that is, you will have a just confidence, that God will deal no less favourably with you, than you have with your brother. He will cancel your sins, and intitle you

* *His commands are not grievous.*

to heaven here, the reward of the peaceful, (*Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called the children of God*) and put you in the possession hereafter.

O my God! give me thy holy grace, that I may never despair of thy mercy, nor presume on my own force. St. Peter has left the world a sad demonstration, that whosoever relies on his own strength, stands within an ace of his ruin. Our only security is confidence in thy goodness, and fear of our own weakness: that will give us the victory over the greatest temptations, and this will afford us an easy conquest over the lesser. Give me therefore thy holy spirit, that I may fulfil all thy commands, and so either carry innocence, or at least repentance, to the grave.

GOSPEL of St. Matthew, Chap. xi. Verse

2. *Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples,*

3. *And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?*

4. *Jesus answered, and said unto them, Go, and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see:*

5. *The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them:*

6. *And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.*

7. *And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, what went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind?*

8. *But what went ye out for to see? A man cloathed in soft raiment? Behold, they that wear soft cloathing are in kings houses.*

9. *But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet.*

10. *For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.*

The MORAL REFLECTION.

CHRIST (about the thirtieth year of his age) entered upon the function of his mission, and confirmed his doctrine by a cloud of miracles: the fame of the precepts he gave, and of the strange prodigies he wrought, posted through the kingdom, and every one descanted on the matter, as passion, prejudice, or inclination moved him. St. John was under restraint; yet the noise entered the dungeon; *John heard in prison the works of Christ*, and immediately sent an embassy, to know from his own mouth, if he were the long expected Messiah. *Sending two of his disciples, he said to him, art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?*

This holy man almost step'd out of the cradle into the desert, and left the conversation of men for that of angels. However, he was more in love with his duty than solitude, and abandoned at last the innocent pleasure of retirement, to enter upon the labour of preaching: the publick incest of the prince called him to court: he foresaw the danger, but zeal raised his soul above fear: he could not reprehend the king without offence, nor hold his peace without a crime: he therefore told Herod, *it was not lawful for him to have his brother's wife*. Herod esteemed his person, tho' he blamed his liberty; but in fine, he rewarded his charity with a dungeon.

This is the common practice of debauched Christians, as well as of an incestuous Jew: they run the high way to hell, and take it ill to be warned of the danger: they will sin without controul, as well

as without remorse. Poor creatures! like wounded men, they are fore, and dread to be touched; or like children, scream at the sight of a lancet, and rather suffer the infection of an ulcer, than the pain of a cure. But pastors must not neglect their duty, tho' Christians overlook theirs: they must practise all the pious subtilties of zeal and prudence, to recal a strayed sinner; they must mingle their exhortations with all the marks of concern, and sweeten reproof with all the gentle ingredients of affection. Men may be perswaded, but not hector'd, into repentance; and that pastor, who pretends to storm and chide his flock into regularity, may excite their anger, but not sorrow: his care must stoop to the lowest, and his courage (when charity requires it) must not startle at the highest. As their vices are more exposed to view, so they are more contagious; they scatter the infection, and, like the plague, sweep away whole cities, whilst the faults of particulars are merely personal, and, like an apoplexy, stop at the death of one man. Tho' therefore he respects the persons of the nobility, he must not compliment their sins: this would be to carry deference and ceremony too far; for tho' their station exacts regard, their failings challenge none; and because figure may recommend lewdness, he should with more care remove the occasion.

St. John, tho' bred in a desert, was not such a stranger to the court, as not to know, there is but one remove from a prison to the scaffold, and that, if Herod (who esteemed him) recompensed his charity with chains, the adulterers, who hated him, would push on cruelty a step further. Certain therefore of his death, he dispatched two of his disciples to our Saviour, to learn from his own mouth, if he was the Messiah, *Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?*

What! Did John doubt whether Christ was the

long promised, and as long expected Saviour of mankind? he, who confessed he was unworthy to *unloose his shoe*? that he was *the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world*? who leaped for joy in his mother's womb by revelation, and paid homage before he saw him? No, no; he moved not like a reed at the impulse of every wind, but was constant in principles and practice.

This admirable man foresaw his end draw near, and he had a mind to place his disciples in our Saviour's service: he would not leave them to their own choice, which oftener is made by the counsel of passion, than the advice of reason, and considers more the advantages of the body than those of the soul.

Now, had he dismissed them his company, and commanded them to follow Christ, perchance, fear to offend him, or at least, love and esteem for his person, might have with-held them: to plain these difficulties, he sends them on an errand, in appearance for his own instruction, but in reality for theirs; not doubting but the sweet and majestick air of Christ's divine person would soon charm their eyes, the sanctity of his doctrine subdue their hearts, and the strangeness of his miracles captivate their understanding. In fine, he expected his *Dimittimus* from the cruelty of Herod, and the rage of an exasperated woman, whose fury was as boundless as her criminal amours: and therefore, he would provide for the salvation of his disciples betimes; that, breaking off all commerce with this world, he might with more freedom place all his thoughts upon the other.

Would Christians follow this conduct of the *Forerunner*, they might live better and die more secure. With what ease would they quit the world, did they not leave their hearts behind? But alas! we are wedded to earth, and the contract runs generally for life: when we enjoy health, 'tis death to think of a will: both estate and soul too must be disposed of in

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our last sickness; as if we were then most fit for a business of such concern, when pain stuns reason, and the disease has almost robbed us of the very faculty of feeling.

Dispose therefore your temporal affairs betimes; the last moments of your life are only due to eternity: as St. John placed his beloved disciples in the school of virtue, provide stations for your children, that rather lead to piety than lewdness. He, who raises his designs to the purchase of heaven, is better provided for, than he who conquers an empire; and those parents, whose prime care aims at their childrens spiritual good, seldom want the satisfaction of seeing them great. Force them not into the licentious court of an incestuous Herod: tho' they raise great fortunes, the building stands upon great crimes, which God himself declares to be a weak foundation: the Babel must fall, and probably will stifle the builders under its ruins. But if you deliver them up to *Christ's* discipline, you may with St. John die in peace: for those cannot be miserable, who practise virtue here, and, if they persevere, will certainly be happy hereafter.

Our Saviour thought not fit to return a direct answer to St. John's question, but sent the disciples back with this message. *Go and shew John again those things, which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk: the lepers are cleansed, &c.*

By the text it appears, Christ preached before these deputies, and then gave force to his words by wonders: he knew, an ill man may speak well, and an impostor preach up morals; but it is above his power to work true miracles: interest, hypocrisy, or faction, may vent sound principles; God alone can reverse the standing and settled laws of nature.

When the disciples were withdrawn, Christ began St. John's panegyrick. In all probability, the multitude

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multitude was shock'd at the message he sent our Saviour, and suspected he had changed his opinion ; and for this reason he ask'd this question : *What went ye out to see ? a reed shaken with the wind ?* Think you, that John, who acknowledged me for the Messias, is now of another mind ? No, no ; he put the query for his disciples satisfaction, not his own : his belief varies not with the season, nor, like a reed, follows the impulse of every wind : he is still the same, unchangeable in his faith, and uncorrupt in his practice.

But this eulogium of St. John is a satire upon the greatest part of mankind, who yield to the breath of every passion. Men shift their religion like their cloaths, and fight to-day for that they will fight against to-morrow, with an equal eagerness. Any sect satisfies them for a time, and no one long : so that having run through all religions, they end in atheism ; and admit no creed for orthodox, but that all are indifferent, or apocryphal.

They are as constant to their morals, as their religion : the first temptation carries off their virtue ; and they seldom repent of one sin, but to strike upon another. One would think they play'd at fast and loose with God, crimes tread so fast on the heels of repentance, and repentance on those of sin : so that they seem not sorry for their offences, but their sorrow ; and repent in earnest of an apparent repentance. To keep the commandments one month, and transgress them eleven, will not save you : no, no ; you must forfeit your life for your religion, and either carry off into the other world innocence, or repentance.

Christ puts this second question ; *What went you out for to see ? a man cloath'd in soft raiment ?* Certainly our panegyrists would scarce overlook his other rare prerogatives, to flourish upon his garment of camel's hair. This might indeed serve
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for a subject of laughter, but not of praise; and I believe by his exterior we should have taken him rather for a madman than a prophet. But Christ rates not the value of men by the price of their apparel: he prefers a saint in sackcloth, before a sinner in embroidery; and a man, who contemns finery, before him who wears it. Believe me, who-soever employs much time in setting off his body, seldom thinks of embellishing his soul. Cloaths indeed should fit our quality, as well as our body; but it's frenzy to pride in those ornamental trifles, that are covers of our shame. Cloaths are marks of our misery, not of our greatness; and therefore it's no less absurd to look big because we are fine, than because we are guilty.

O Lord Jesus! I believe thou art *the desire* (or expectation) of *all nations*, the Messias; that thou hast fulfilled to a tittle the two grand offices of Teacher and Redeemer; for thou hast taught us our duty by thy example, and ransomed us with thy blood; thou hast so plained the way to heaven, that the blind may see it, and children walk in it. I acknowledge thee my guide as well as my master, and intend to frame all my actions by the rule of thy law. I confess I have often rather followed the impulse of nature than of thy grace, and contemned thy maxims to embrace those of the world: but I promise for the future an inviolable fidelity to thy commands, and wish I might expiate with my blood those crimes I intend to purge at least with my tears.

EPISTLE

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EPISTLE to the Philippians, Chap. iv. Verse

4. *Rejoice in the Lord alway : and again I say, rejoice.*

5. *Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.*

6. *Be careful for nothing ; but in every thing, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.*

7. *And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*

THE MORAL REFLECTION.

THE apostle exhorts the Philippians to the practice of all those virtues, that make a good man, and a perfect christian. But why does he invite them to rejoice with such a transport of pathos and energy. *Rejoice, I say again, rejoice.* One would think an exhortation to seriousness and moderation might have been more seasonable, unless these Grecians were of a more melancholy complexion, than the English ; for it is certain, gaiety is our defect, not mopingness ; our mirth flies even to madness, and the whole year seems in our island to be one mad carnival.

However, the apostle commands the Philippians to rejoice ; and to shew he was in earnest, he repeats the precept. *I say again, rejoice.* Nay, and this joy must be continual.

What great happiness called for so excessive a joy ? Neither grandeur, wealth, nor learning ; for all these, being purely natural, are below the mirth of a Christian, and rather deserve contempt than joy. For in fine, tho' of themselves they are not bad, yet on the other side they are not good ; their value depends on our management, and (God knows)

knows) they oftener render men worse than better.

The apostle therefore does not invite us to rejoice, on view of any temporal concern, but to *rejoice in the Lord*, who has been pleased to dignify us with the title of Christians. This is an honour above the level of patent and escutcheon, and makes us truly great and happy, unless we misuse the gift, and foolishly betray our own interest. For Christ has raised us from a state of bondage to another of liberty : of slaves to the devil, he has made us sons of God : now this adoption entails not on us a claim to a petty lordship, or to a fleeting empire, but to heaven itself ; where we shall live above the reach of fortune, and the troublesome alarms of fear or hope. This certainly is a subject worthy of joy ; and he, who can be sad upon such an amazing prospect of honour and happiness, must be supinely foolish, or superlatively melancholy, or at least unacquainted with the circumstances of his own condition.

It is true, we cannot enter upon the possession of this inheritance without force and violence ; yet we are sure of the conquest, if we will only take the pains to overcome. The whole success of the enterprize turns upon our resolution ; we may surrender, but cannot be forc'd ; our strength is superior to that of our enemies (for *the Lord is our help*) so that the defeat must lie at our own door.

Rejoice then in the Lord, and even always. Nothing ought to damp this chearfulness but sin, because nothing (but this) can cut off the entail to heaven, or endanger our eternal happiness. Tho' fortune toss us, from the top of honour, into the lowest abyss of contempt and ignominy ; tho' diseases prey upon our bodies, violence and injustice upon our estates ; tho' we groan under all the temporal miseries, flesh can suffer, and tyrants in-

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vent; all these pressures ought not to interrupt the course of our joy, because they cannot repeal the right to eternal bliss Christ has purchased for us at the infinite price of his sacred blood. Nay, if we support them with courage and resignation to providence, they will polish our virtue, refine our merits, and fit us for a more glorious sovereignty: *Rejoice then always*, even under the greatest *sufferings*, and receive the most sensible afflictions, as marks of God's affection, and persuade yourselves, he punishes you in time, to spare you for eternity.

Let your moderation be known unto all men. Tho' you are joyful, be not immoderately so: let joy lodge in your heart, and moderation sit on your exterior, for edification: this virtue regulates the outward behaviour; it prescribes a mean to our gestures, and an unaffected motion to all the parts of our body. It forbids a starch'd stiffness in conversation, as unseasonable; and a petulant levity, as scandalous. Be neither morose, nor airy; neither too fullen, nor over-complaisant; never speak ill of others, nor well of yourself; that is criminal, and this foolish: in fine, be easy without affectation: this is ridiculous in the eyes of men, and seldom innocent in the sight of God.

To move effectually the Philippians to the study of virtue, the apostle urges this motive, *For the Lord is at hand.* Be modest, peaceful, and obliging, not only to friends, (which is only a Pagan or Jewish virtue) but also to your enemies; bear prosperity with moderation, and adversity with patience; *For the Lord is at hand*; he contemplates your combats against the assaults of flesh and blood, to crown your courage, and punish your cowardice. When you shall have breathed your last, and death shall have closed your eyes (and, alas! this fatal moment cannot be far off, and may be nigher than you imagine) he will call you to a severe account.

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Did Christians carry this great truth continually in their thoughts, with what care should we set guards at all the avenues of our senses to keep off temptation? With what resolution should we encounter it? We should tie up our passions (like slaves) to their duty, and not encourage their sallies by caresses, but suppress them by the severity of force and discipline. But alas! tho' this article find a place in our creed, it has none in our thoughts, and so we live like those infidels, who suppose God a meer idol, who neither has eyes to see our trespasses, nor power to chastise them.

Seeing therefore our treasure is lodged in heaven, let us send up our hearts thither also, and never condemn them to the love of earthly concerns. Be not solicitous either for the good or evil things of this world. You can neither enjoy those, nor suffer these long; so that those are unable to render you happy, or these miserable.

And because we are too weak to make one step towards heaven, unless God strengthens us by his grace; *In every thing, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.* Place all your confidence in God's goodness, and all your strength in his grace; return him thanks for past favours, which is the most effectual way to obtain new ones.

And, if you are so happy as to follow the apostle's advice, *The peace of God which passeth all understanding will keep your hearts.* You will carry a paradise about you, a peace of mind, only to be express'd by those, who feel such a perpetual serenity, that neither the tempests of fear, nor hope, can overcast; a pleasure that glides not indeed smoothly upon the organ, but that affects the soul, and gives it a taste of heaven upon earth. Oh the pleasure of a good conscience, that furnishes all contentments, besides those that are brutal! he,
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who has no domestick enemy within, laughs at all those foreign alarms, that startle the wicked, and stretch the guilty on continual racks ; he neither burns with love, nor shivers with hatred ; neither swells with hope, nor shrinks with despair ; he envies not the rich, nor contemns the poor ; covets not prosperity, nor dreads adversity ; he has the same indifference for life and death ; that has no charms for him, and this no horror.

Oh my God ! seeing by the mouth of thy apostle, thou commandest me to rejoice, I submit to thy orders : but thy goodness alone shall be the object of my joy. I will take no complacency in any advantage either of nature or fortune : for alas ! I may be miserable with them, and happy without them : But I will rejoice, because thou hast taken me into the number of thy children, and raised me to the dignity of heir apparent to heaven ; this is an honour vile man could never expect, much less hope ; yet thy bounty exceeds both expectation and hope, and has even abased thy Son, to raise a slave. O compleat thy work ; and so supply me with resolution from above, that I may subdue my enemies, and conquer the happy Canaan thou hast assigned me !

GOSPEL of St. John, Chap. i. Verse

19. *And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem, to ask him, who art thou ?*

20. *And he confessed, and denied not : but confessed, I am not the Christ.*

21. *And they asked him, what then ? Art thou Elias ? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet ? And he answered, no.*

22. *Then*

22. *Then said they unto him, who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us: what sayest thou of thy self?*

23. *He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias.*

24. *And they which were sent, were of the Pharisees.*

25. *And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not the Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet?*

26. *John answered them; saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not:*

27. *He it is, who coming after me, is preferred before me, whose shoes latchet I am not worthy to unloose.*

28. *These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing.*

THE MORAL REFLECTION.

THE Jews were in continual expectation of their Messias. A stranger sat in the throne of David, which, according to Jacob's prophecy, was to remain in the line of Juda, *till Shiloh came*, Gen. xlix. 10. The apparition of the wonderful star, that led the *Magi* to Jerusalem, and their enquiry after the new born King, alarmed the tyrant, and raised a firm persuasion in the priests and people, that their long look'd for Saviour was come. The admirable life of the baptist struck them with amazement; they supposed his person was no less extraordinary than his conduct; and that his nature was as divine as his behaviour. The seraphick exhortations he made in the desert drew unto him whole shoals of proselytes, and his baptism put the whole nation into a ferment. So that the priests, together

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with the people, concluded this was the man designed by Providence to knock off the chains of the Roman servitude, and to restore the kingdom to its ancient splendor.

The clergy sent a solemn embassy to the saint to clear the point; that is, to know from his own mouth if he was really the Messias. *Who art thou?* This question put John's virtue to the test. To esteem ourselves little, when others esteem us less; to affect a low station, when a higher is out of our reach, is no hard task: but to contemn our merits, when others admire them; to refuse honour, when it's thrown upon us; is all that can be expected from the most refined virtue.

Pride is the hereditary vice of all mankind; it is the darling passion both of the prince and peasant; it waits on us thro' all the different stations of life; it is the first that attacks us, and the last that leaves us: and whosoever subdues this passion, may easily master all the others. Had St. John acknowledged himself the Messias; the hearts and hands of all the Jews would in all probability have made good the usurp'd dignity.

But he was so far from aspiring to the dignity of Messias, that he answered, *I am not the Christ*. Nay, he refused the very title of prophet. *Art thou that prophet?* He answer'd, *No*. He would be great in the sight of God, not in that of men; and therefore he would not make himself less by arrogating too much.

But God permitted the deputies to redouble their assaults, that the fore-runner's humility might appear more illustrious, and his victory more compleat. They supposed he declined the dignity out of a principle of modesty, and his baptizing the multitude seem'd to warrant their mistake. For they had learn'd out of Ezechiel and Zechariah, that baptizing made part of the Messias's character.

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Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your iniquities, Ezek. xxxvi. 25. In that day there shall be a fountain open'd to the house of David, Zec. xiii. 1. They redouble therefore their instance, and peremptorily ask, by what authority he baptizes, if he be not Christ. But this saint answers, they mistook the meaning of the scriptures, and apply'd to his baptism, what only belongs to Christ's. In fine, they press upon him the title with eagerness, and he refuses the honour with heat and earnestness.

The saint reads us here a very profitable lesson; and, would we take pains to learn it, men might possibly live more happily, I am sure more christianly. We are so far from refusing honour, that we pursue it under all shapes, even to the pitch of folly and dotage. We charge through all the ties of blood and friendship, through all the principles of conscience, and, what is strange, of honour also, to carry off this imaginary fantome: as if guilt were the ready way to glory, and the most degrading quality the most dignifying. Can any thing be imagined more foolish (childish I would say, were it innocent) than to clap one's body on the rack, to pawn heaven and leap into hell, for a petty applause, that seldom is sincere, and never lasting, and always insignificant? That leans on the bare courtesy of men, who judge at random, and cannot be sufficiently blamed themselves? Who are as inconstant in their verdict, as the wind to the same corner, and, upon the least turn of fortune, drown their *Hosanna's* with the outrageous outcries of *Crucify him, crucify him*.

These people should put the same question to themselves the Jews did to the Baptist. Who am I? Holy Job has drawn an exact picture of mankind, that answers the question. *Man that is born of a woman, hath but a short time to live, and is*
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full of misery. Our beginning is shameful, and our end frequently disastrous. We come into the world in sin; most live like beasts, and many also make an exit like them; but with this difference, that brutes vanish into nothing, and these unfortunate creatures die eternally.

Our bodies are of the same alloy with the earth we tread on. Kings, queens, lords, and ladies, are of the same mould with the peasant: some difference may lie on the surface; but there is none in nature. What then is beauty, but a fair impostor, but artifice, but deceit, but a loathsome deformity under a pleasing varnish? When death tears off the vizard, complexion will vanish into a ghastly paleness, and be changed into one mass of contemptible dust and ashes!

Our soul is indeed immortal, endowed with liberty, but condemn'd to slavery: it knows good, but chuses evil. By the assistance of God's grace it may be happy, and, by abusing it, will be eternally miserable. Have we not therefore more reason to blush, than to be vain; to tremble with fear, than to swell with pride? In a word, my vices are my own, my virtue is the work of God: so that every thing preaches to me humility on the one side, and gratitude to my great Benefactor on the other.

Hitherto St. John had replied in negatives; he told the deputies what he was not; they insisted to know what he was. If you are neither the Messias, nor Elias, nor a Prophet; tell us at least who you are; *that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What say'st thou of thyself? I am* (reply'd he) *the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord.* A sound: one remove from nothing. Thus this man of God forgets his high prerogatives of grace, to contemplate the imperfections of his nature; and tho', in the opinion
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of God himself, he was *more than a prophet*, in his own, he was only a degree from nothing. Yet these low thoughts made him greater than he was, and, by affecting to appear the least of men, he raised himself above the greatest: *Among them that are born of women, there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist*, Matth. xi. 11.

It is strange, that, tho' these deputies were by publick order in search for the Messias, and that St. John assured them he was come; nay, and *stood in the midst of them*: yet we find not upon record, that they made any further enquiry after him; which is a convincing argument that this parade of a solemn embassy was not intended to discover the truth, but to conceal some hidden intrigue; and that at least curiosity had a greater hand in the business than sincerity. For why did they take no notice of Christ the next day, when John shewed him to the Jews, *Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world*.

How many in the world steer their course in the search of religion by the conduct of the Jews; they are in a continual quest after it; religion is the common topick of their discourse; they chase it in every conventicle; yet, in the room of truth, they generally light upon error, and abandon one schism, to strike in with another. The reason of this miscarriage is, that people seldom carry sincerity about them in the search; interest is their guide and prejudice their privy-counsellor: and when these two passions domineer, our understanding abandons us, and so we grope in the dark. Our heart reasons, not our head; our will discourages, and the intellect acquiesces to its sophisms.

O my God! I had no right to be, much less to be great, beautiful, or rich: whatever I possess is the effect of thy power on the one side, and of thy goodness on the other. Must I therefore be

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vain, because thou art bountiful ? or boast of my riches, because thou hast given me a large alms ? Oh no ; to glory in the gifts of nature or fortune, is folly ; to appropriate those of grace, a sacrilege.

I. EPISTLE to the Corinthians, Chap. iv. Ver.

1. *Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.*

2. *Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.*

3. *But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment : yea, I judge not my own self.*

4. *For I know nothing by my self, yet am I not hereby justified : but he that judgeth me is the Lord.*

5. *Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts, and then shall every man have praise of God.*

The MORAL REFLECTION.

SCARCE had St. Paul left Corinth, when other preachers step'd into the pulpit, and stole the people's affection by chiming periods and quaint expressions. They had more of the sophist than of the apostle, and rather taught eloquence than the gospel. However, this new way took ; and many preferred this pedantick oratory to St. Paul's simplicity : so that at last the infant church of Corinth fell into factions: some stood up for Paul, others for Apollos, and every lady gave the preference to her director.

St. Paul heard of the scandal, and, to put a stop to the growing evil, he sends this epistle, and blames

blames the disorder. He tells them with warmth, it is not their business to dispute, whether he or others preach better, or discharge the duty of apostles with more fruit, or greater edification; that such heats promise no good, and threaten much harm; that it is their concern not to follow the doctors, but the doctrine, not to idolize those who preach well, nor to despise those who preach ill; that they ought to regard them barely as ministers of Christ, and to respect alone the character. *Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.* This relation impowers us to declare those truths God has revealed, and to administer those sacraments he has instituted. To what purpose therefore (continues he) such heats, such contentions whether I preach worse, or live better than Apollos; For, in a word, I neither value your esteem, nor fear your contempt. *With me it is a very small thing, that I shou'd be judged of you.* Why then do you raise factions, and divide into schisms for my sake, who am neither concerned at your blame, nor moved by your applause? I labour for God's honour and your profit; and I had rather carry off the name of a bad preacher, if you profit, than of an able one, if you do not.

St. Paul gives those, whom God calls to the care of souls, a rare lesson, *viz.* They must preach God by works as well as words, at home as well as in the pulpit. Men will with reason suspect a pastor is in jest, who continually holds forth upon the excellence of virtue, and at the same time practises vice; who lashes the vanities of the world, yet prostitutes his character to purchase them.

2dly, They must deliver the mysteries of God, not the fancies of their own brain, nor obtrude human errors for divine truths; they must not screw up the morals of the gospel to a stretch'd severity;

nor yet unbend them to a scandalous laxity. Christ never empowered his ministers to coin new maxims of manners, but only to explain his, and, as it is criminal to widen heaven-gate, so it is not less sinful to straiten it. New principles are dangerous, and a new way to heaven leads immediately to hell.

3dly, They must draw profelytes to God, not to themselves; their zeal must be sweet, and their charity universal. The Corinthian teachers seem unprovided of these qualities; they marched at the head of their partizans, and kept up the divisions, to maintain their own reputation; but whosoever courts esteem, is unqualified for a preacher of the cross; and, if he regards his own interest, he has no concern for that of Jesus Christ.

They must square the exercise of their function by the example of St. Paul, who protested he neither feared the censure of the Corinthians, nor was ambitious of their esteem,

Nay, the faint durst not pronounce upon himself, altho' he was furnish'd with better evidence for a true judgment than the Corinthians: *yea I judge not my own self*. How dare you usurp a power to judge me, who am not qualified to frame a right judgment of my self; My conscience indeed seems clear; it neither reproaches me with neglect of my charge, nor with any transgression of the laws of my profession; tho' therefore I cannot condemn myself of a crime, I dare not bring myself in, Not guilty. *Yet am I not hereby justified*. We must stand or fall by God's sentence alone, who discovers, without mask or disguise, our guilt, or innocence, and will reward this, and punish that. *He that judgeth me, is the Lord*.

St. Paul had been rapt up into the third heaven, and distinguished with a hundred marks of particular affection; yet he durst not pretend to acquit himself;

himself; he hoped in God's mercy, yet feared his justice; and therefore he walked with caution and reserve; he mingled fear with hope, and counselled the faithful to follow his example: *Work out your salvation with fear and trembling.* Phil. ii. 12.

Security flings men off their guard, and lays them open to all the inroads of temptation. Dear reader, tho' your conscience appears clear, fancy not your self already above the stars; you have indeed good reason to hope, and yet as great to fear. The first will with-hold you from despair, the second from presumption, and both will awaken your care, and enliven your diligence.

Therefore judge nothing before the time. Being therefore unfit even to frame a true judgment of our selves, with what face can we usurp the bench, and pass sentence upon others? Outward appearances are oftentimes a deceitful evidence; and yet passion, partiality, and prejudice misrepresent even these: they impose upon our reason, and often upon our very senses. Besides, invincible ignorance and inadvertence may excuse several actions; and so, tho' they appear in themselves blameable before men, perchance they are not sinful in the sight of God. How do you know but these circumstances may absolve those you peremptorily condemn? Till therefore you obtain the privilege of reading mens thoughts, and of diving to the bottom of their consciences, you must not mount the tribunal, and, if you attempt it, you transgress the laws of justice and charity. Yet alas! tho' God forbids us to intermeddle with his prerogative, we usurp the bench, and without scruple pass unjust sentence upon our neighbour, to draw a more just condemnation upon our own temerity.

Because a lady is airy, without farther ceremony or information, we conclude she is light, and that she is void of honour, because unfurnished of devotion;

tion ; but is there no mean between mirth and madness ? between a gay deportment and prostitution ? between freedom and a great crime ?

Again, something is missing in the family : without further examination it is voted stolen, and the theft fathered upon an innocent domestick : but why ? you must expect no reason ; the trial and condemnation stand on a bare suspicion, on a mere caprice. However, an innocent is judged guilty, and must forfeit his reputation for a thing misplaced by madam herself. In fine, the mistake is acknowledged, and the rash sentence reversed, but not the sin. I say the sin ; for to fix a theft upon a man without sufficient proof, is beyond all peradventure a sin, nay and mortal too, if the thing were of value ; so that, tho' the servant be an imaginary thief, the mistress is a real one ; for she has condemned at her tribunal, without just evidence, a neighbour, withdrawn the good opinion she owed him, not as a benevolence, but a right, and strip'd him of his reputation. But you concealed your thoughts, that is, you are guilty before God of a rash judgment, but not of detraction : but I suppose one sin deserves damnation, and tho' you might have been more wicked, you cannot plead, Not guilty. This sin is (God knows) common in practice ; but custom is no warrant for a bad action ; there is no prescription against God's laws ; neither numbers nor quality can repeal them. Let us therefore judge no body ; we are unqualified for the post. God alone can commission us, and he has reserved the prerogative to himself : *He that judgeth me is the Lord,*

Condemn therefore no man ; leave all to God's tribunal, who certainly will reward and punish. We are all criminals, and step beyond the bounds of our condition, whenever we pretend to sit as judges, unless it be upon ourselves ; this is our province,

province, this our duty. No action must pass without a censure; we must sift our thoughts, suspect our virtue; and deplore our vices; a severe sentence upon ourselves draws down a favourable one from heaven; God declares us innocent, when we cry guilty; and absolves us at his tribunal, when we condemn ourselves at our own.

GOSPEL of St. Luke, Chap. iii. Verse

1. *Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Cæsar, Pontius Pilate being governour of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea, and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abylene,*

2. *Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.*

3. *And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins;*

4. *As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.*

5. *Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth;*

6. *And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.*

THE MORAL REFLECTION.

SAINTE Luke represents St. John leaving the solitude of the wilderness, to begin the office of fore-runner: he adds the circumstances of time, to shew he was commissioned to promulge the Messias's coming, just when the seventieth week, so long before

fore foretold by the prophet Daniel, began. *In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Cæsar, &c. the word of the Lord came unto John the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness.* He had passed all his days in silence and retirement, and led the life rather of an angel, than of a man, and by a long practice had acquired all those virtues that make a great saint, and the qualities that set off an able preacher. He left the wilderness as Moses did mount Sinai, with a flaming heart and a seraphick tongue: *Repent* was the common theme of his discourse, the usual text of his exhortations: he repeated it over all the country beyond Jordan. His province was to prepare the way of our Lord. *The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord.* And how could he better dispose the people to receive the new law of the Messias, and to relish his divine precepts, than by drawing them from a lewd and scandalous life to virtue and sobriety? for it is certain, those, who court this world, have no inclination to fling away their thoughts upon another. They are so enamour'd of their present enjoyments, that future expectations make small impressions, and a continual commerce with earth has so nailed the soul to this world, that without violence they cannot raise it a foot above the horizon. Besides, whosoever transgresses the laws of God, in his heart, wishes there were none, and certainly such people are not inclined to receive severe principles of a strict morality; for they have no regard for virtue; they have taken another bias, and are gone over to another interest. Religion is not their concern, but pleasure, and an uncontrouled liberty to believe and act as passion, interest, and caprice moves them: for libertinism in belief and manners are reciprocal; the one is a consequence of the other: and indeed it is almost impossible for men, who run through a whole course of debauchery, to be steady to any religion. They must
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first turn good men, before they will resolve to be faithful Christians.

St. John therefore could not better prepare men to receive Christ, and his divine Gospel, than by persuading them to forsake their sins: by this he removed the three greatest obstacles; pride, luxury, and avarice. For what probability is there, that the proud should stoop to an humble God, the luxurious to a chaste one, and the avaritious to an indigent one? Seeing therefore a sincere repentance is necessary to receive the Messias, and to deserve his favours; it will be an important point to consider in what it consists.

There is a false repentance as well as a true one, and often the one is so like the other, that God alone can discover the imposture. Saul seemed to pronounce, *I have sinned*, with no less grief for his disobedience, than David for his adultery and homicide. Yet though the expression was the same, the effect was different; for David received absolution, and Saul the sentence of condemnation.

Some find such charms in one *Lord have mercy on me*, that they fancy this short ejaculation carries all before it: it disarms God's justice, (they suppose) appeases his anger, and melts his heart into mercy. But if this will do, we must conclude, that all the sinners in the world are either mad, or infidels, or penitent. For must not those people have thrown aside their wit, as well as grace, who will not part with one *Lord have mercy on me*, for the favour of God's friendship, and all those glorious appurtenances that accompany it? Or if you suppose them in their senses, can they believe there is a heaven to receive the penitent, and a hell to torture the obstinate, and at the same time refuse to make so easy an address for pardon? It is scandalous to religion to fancy God will make peace with a traitor upon so easy terms;

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terms ; it encourages vice, makes majesty cheap, and sinners insolent and outrageous.

True repentance is a detestation of our sins, as offences towards God, and a firm resolution to sin no more. By this we undo (as much as in us lies) what we have done ; we heartily condemn our past conduct, and resolve, with the hazard of our lives, to walk within the compass of God's commandments, to balk appetite, and to force all our disorderly passions to their duty.

No natural motive is sufficient to procure a pardon. To detest your sins, because they have preyed upon your estate, and lodged you in a goal, is not to deplore the fault, but poverty and confinement: it reaches the injury you have done your self, not the outrage you have done your Creator. Such penitents are common in Newgate and the King's-Bench ; but their regret will not retrieve their temporal misfortunes, much less their eternal. It must soar higher, to plead for mercy at God's tribunal. His greatness they have offended, and he must be the motive of their repentance : and for want of this, how many live penitents, yet die in the end reprobates ?

I once met with a gentleman, who laid open all his past debaucheries with such a transport of sorrow and disgust, that I thought myself in the company of the penitent psalmist : he run out into such lengths of sorrow and distaste, that I supposed his sighs had stormed heaven, and obtained pardon. The very thought of his past life threw him into convulsions, and he made a thousand resolutions rather to die than to strike upon those rocks that had sunk his innocence. But after all, his misfortunes were the object of his sorrow, not his sins : a miss had run away with his estate, and left him nothing for his kindness, but poverty, diseases, and a dungeon : he saw himself without money, without friends, pitied
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by few, and lampoon'd by a hundred ; coop'd up in prison without hope of enlargement ; and these unhappy circumstances wrung from him tears of sorrow, but not of true repentance. He felt indeed all the pain of it, but not the consolation ; for, in a word, it was merely natural, a rage rather than a grief, to see himself stripp'd of an opulent fortune by a deceitful Dalilah, shut up in a prison, and abandoned by his friends and relations. True repentance must spring from a hatred of sin, as opposite to the sanctity of God, to whose power we owe our being.

Nor will a supernatural detestation suffice, unless it includes a resolution not to sin mortally for the future ; whence it follows, that the penitent must fly all those occasions that are called *Immediate occasions* ; without this, your repentance is vain, insignificant ; in fine, grimace and pure imposture. For who can loath the effect and love the cause ? seek the occasions, that in all probability will plunge him into sin, and at the same time resolve not to fall ? You may as seriously resolve to burn in a frozen lake, or to freeze in a glowing furnace. *He that loves the cause must also love the effect.*

You live in a criminal commerce ; your conscience flies at length in your face ; a thousand vipers prey upon your heart ; as many furies rise from hell to torment you, as you have thoughts in the day or dreams in the night. Oh ! you will never again purchase a petty pleasure at such an exorbitant price : in the mean time, like silly flies, you hover about the flame that consumes you ; you affect the company that rifles your innocence. One sin treads upon the heels of another ; resolutions are made, and as often broken. You haunt the creature that is the cause and companion of your sin, and consequently can no more resolve seriously not to fall, than a man, that leaps down a precipice, can propose not to break
his

his neck ; *Who handleth pitch, says the wiseman, will be defiled.*

You must separate from the person ; nothing but absence can remove the danger, and cure the frenzy : but this is hard ! it may be so : however, an eternal separation from God will sit more uneasy upon you, than a removal from a wretched creature, that fascinates you here, to damn you hereafter. Our Saviour commands us to pluck out our eyes, and cut off our hands and feet, if they endanger our salvation ; and assures us, it is much more advantageous for us to fly up to heaven blind and lame, than to fall into hell with all our limbs. Altho' this be not to be understood in a literal sense, yet the energy of the expression informs us, that we must withdraw from all those conversations ; wean our affections from those objects that conspire our ruin ; and even disband from ourselves, nay, and expose the body to torture and death, to save our soul : for the advantage overtops the difficulty, and the reward rises higher than the labour ; for by it God receives us into his favour, and changes our condemnation to hell into a claim to heaven. What man in his wits will buy a prostitute's love, at the expence of these glorious prerogatives ? yet alas ! all our men of parts, of merit, our virtuoso's, and topping mortals, are guilty of this stupidity, because they sleep in sin, and will not cut off the occasion.

When we are truly sorry, we must compleat our repentance, by *bringing forth fruits worthy of repentance.* Those, who have pampered their bodies, and bought a brutish pleasure of sense at the price of God's displeasure, must punish its rebellion with abstinence, and diet it into subjection and obedience ; they must guard their senses, and bar them not only criminal satisfactions, but even lawful ; and when this is done, we shall not only see our Redeemer, but feel the benefit of his favours ; he will lodge
in

in our soul, together with a train of heavenly gifts. *He will come and make his abode with us*, John xiv. 23. and leave a pleasure, that they alone can express, who feel it ; a pleasure without pain, without remorse ; that never cloyes, and never is followed by regret.

O God ! give me such a supply of grace that I may never fall, or at least that I may quickly rise by a sincere repentance. I renounce perpetually all those conversations, that have decoyed me into sin, and may dissuade me from repentance : I despise their friendship, and pity their malice, and sacrifice all temporal concerns to my duty. If I can purchase thy friendship, O God ! I contemn all the careffes or hatred of men ; neither the one can make me happy, nor the other miserable.

EPISTLE to Titus, Chap. ii. Verse

11. *For the grace of God, that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men ;*

12. *Teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godlily in this present world :*

13. *Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ.*

14. *Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.*

15. *These things speak and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.*

The MORAL REFLECTION.

S AINT Paul in this Epistle instructs his disciple Titus in the most important points of his office. He prescribes the subjects of his instructions, and commands him to press them home with force and emphasis : nay, and if exhortation alone is unable to persuade his flock to practise the doctrine, he bids him enforce his words with the power of his episcopal authority. *These things speak and exhort, and rebuke with all authority.* Apply sweetness first ; and if that proves ineffectual, have recourse to severity and reproof.

But what are those points he recommends with such earnestness? *The grace of God, that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men, teaching us, &c.* Our Redeemer is come ; he has laid down his life as a ransom for the sins, not only of the Jews, but of the Gentiles also. All those, who are involved in Adam's guilt, have a part in Christ's redemption. The grace of the Saviour reaches as far as the sin of the offender. This mystery is the basis of the new law ; it is the motive of our hope, as well as the object of our belief ; and both are necessary to salvation. With reason therefore the apostle orders his disciple to dwell upon this fundamental, and to imprint it in the minds of his converts, as the first step to happiness. But this belief alone will not seat us in heaven ; we must join an exact observance of his law, and animate our faith with a constant practice of virtue. For the apostle assures us, Christ appeared to men invested with the quality of instructor, as well as that of Redeemer, *teaching us: i. e.* he opened to men heaven-gate by his passion, and mark'd the way by his precepts, of which some are negative : 1. *That denying ungodliness and worldly lusts.* These obstruct our passage. 2. Others positive.

tive: *We should live soberly, righteously, and godlily in this present world.* These lead us on our way, and will place us in the secure haven of eternal repose, if attended on by perseverance.

In the first place therefore, we must avoid ungodliness. I know all mortal sins may be termed impieties; but those more properly deserve the name, that directly cross upon the duty we owe God, as a Father, and fly immediately at his Person. Tho' he be sovereign Lord of men and angels, by the title of his greatness and our dependance; yet he is in a real sense our Father. This he has been pleased to acknowledge in a hundred places of the scripture; and, to express his affection in most lively colours, he has more than once compared himself to a mother. He framed us in our mother's womb, and has raised us from nothing to the dignity of a reasonable being. And, as we owe our existence to his power, so we stand indebted to his goodness for our preservation. He leads us by the hand, and his bounty furnishes us with all the supplies of food and cloathing: what we enjoy is his gift, and what we hope, the effects of his bounty.

Being therefore upon so many unquestionable titles our Father, we must pay him that respect the relation requires, and not, like undutiful children, fly in his face, to court a brutish passion: we must bow with submission to his commands, and kiss his paternal hand, whenever he thinks fit to correct us. For, in fine, chastisements are often marks of his kindness, not of his anger. If he permits an enemy to invade your estate, he intends to secure your eternal inheritance; he makes this world uneasy, to wean you from its allurements; and suffers you to be poor, to force you to be virtuous. It is therefore an iniquity of the deepest dye, to spurn at his conduct, and to arraign his providence on such occasions. It is a crime, not only unworthy of a Christian, but

even of a man ; and were not the humour malicious, it would be no less childish, than to curse a doctor for prescribing an unpalatable potion, when nothing else can overpower the disease, and recover health.

Yet tho' we are conscious, that it is not only foolish, but impious, to censure God's proceedings, we cannot resolve to be innocent ; we put the effects of our debauches to his account, and curse him too, because we have been traitors to our own interest. One sits down to play, he loses the set, and his estate also, and then sends up a volley of curses to heaven. He defies the Omnipotent, and brings him in guilty of intelligence with his adversary : thus at once he plays the fool and the devil ; first by carding away his money, and then by blaspheming away his innocence. So that, to compleat his misfortune, he returns a bankrupt both of money and grace.

Another has rioted away his health : all the diseases, that follow debauchery, pour in upon him : Christianity preaches patience ; and prudence counsels him to turn necessity into virtue. But, no ! his infirmities are laid at God's door ; he breaks out into all the expressions of impiety, and, tho' he professes Christianity, one would take him for a first-rate atheist ; indeed his language proves, he acknowledges a God to swear by, and by consequence to pray to. Now, can we imagine a greater (impiety, shall I say, or madness) than to call God to account for our own faults, and to blaspheme him for our crimes ? he commands moderation in gaming and pleasure ; and threatens punishment if you disobey. However, to gratify a passion, you ruin your estate and prostitute your health, and then curse God for your folly, as if it were his duty to work miracles in favour of our sins, to pack the cards, and turn all the parts of our body into steel. You have more

reason to bless his goodness, who forbore his right

to drag you from your sins to his tribunal, without leaving a moment between the fault and the punishment.

There is another race of impious creatures, who turn impious for impiety's sake ; these rant and swear, not out of passion, but gallantry, to enliven discourse, and to bluster in conversation. This is a strange sin, a mystery of impiety ; it is not set off with the usual charms of other sins ; it wants the gay appearance of pleasure and profit. For where is the pleasure to *subpœna* God to bear witness to our follies ? and where is the profit, unless it be an advantage to forfeit heaven, and to plunge our souls into hell ? But, in spite of the heinousness, as well as the folly of this impiety, men are so fond of it, that it is become universal : discourse languishes, mirth flags, and wit runs low, unless Christ be once more crucified, and his sacred body torn piece-meal by cannibal Christians : nay, tho' the Jews nailed him to a cross, they tore not his body ; but we divide it by our oaths, as if we intended to damn ourselves, by every limb that contributed to our redemption.

Yet you pretend no harm : that is strange ! What ? can a Christian make a mock of the Deity he adores ? can he buffoon his Maker ? blend Majesty with trifles, and the most august Being with rallery, and often with ribaldry also, and mean no harm ? A conscience must be steel'd, that startles not at such a monstrous guilt, and he, who persuades himself such a flaming vice is innocent, may in good time conclude that other crimes are virtues.

It is mere custom, say some : but is a man less guilty, because he often offends ? Is he better for being worse ? or does a frequency of swearing withdraw him from the obligation of the law, *Swear not at all* ? Custom enhances the guilt ; it argues a rank heart and seared conscience, and by consequence bodes destruction. Avoid therefore such

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pieties. When you call God to witness, let the matter be of concern, and the manner respectful, either to protect injured virtue, or to resist triumphant vice.

But besides, Christians must not only avoid those black crimes, that charge immediately God's great attributes, and fall upon his essence; they must carry their aversion farther, to all the petty concerns of this world, *denying ungodliness and worldly lusts*. This is the doctrine of our blessed Saviour, who preached it by word and practice: he forbids his profelytes to love the world, *love not the world*, and protests he will not share in their affection; that whosoever strikes up a league with the world, at the same time declares against him. Nay, he commands us to be so little concerned about worldly amusements, as not even to lay in provisions for the next day. Our only business lies on the other side of time; there we must remain eternally, either in happiness or misery. Our reception there depends on our deportment here. If we plant virtue, we shall reap glory; if vice, punishment.

Is it not then an unpardonable folly to tire our selves in the pursuit of things, that are obtained with pain, and kept with fear? that surfeit when possess'd, and yet torment when lost? seeing, at less expence of time and labour, we may purchase treasures that are immense, that are placed above the reach of thieves or tyrants, that time cannot consume, nor injustice wrest out of our hands.

Believe me, the time will come, when all those prodigals, who lavish away their time and sollicitude in temporal concerns, will cry out with the disappointed apostles, *toiling all night we have caught nothing*. We have worked ourselves down like criminals condemned to the quarries, and what have we gained but the sad remembrance that we have lost all?

I know,

I know, St. Paul intends not to persuade Christians to turn Timons, or to disband from human society, to withdraw from commerce, and leave all government at random. No, no; the prince may sit in his throne, the subject may enjoy his estate, the merchant promote commerce, and the husbandman agriculture; every one may stand in his post, and keep his station; but then they must not drive forward, in this world, over all the barriers of conscience and honour; they must not place their happiness in any advantage they can expect here; nor their misery in any misfortune they can fear; they must not lay out their time upon the pursuits either of preferment or wealth, so as to reserve none for the care of their souls. In fine, they may use the things of this world as steps to mount to heaven, not as burdens to press them down into hell; they were made to conduct us to God, and, if we apply them to any other use, we abuse the very end of their creation; we defeat God's design, and insure our ruin.

But, to discharge our duty, we must not only abstain from sin, but also practise virtue. Piety towards God, justice towards our neighbour, and sobriety towards our selves, these three contain in short our whole obligation, and those, who model their conduct by this rule, may without presumption expect the eternal reward Christ has prepared for those who love him, and stand the sentence of the great Judge without fear or apprehension. These truths St. Paul commanded Titus to imprint in the hearts of his new Christian profelytes; and I recommend them to the reader with the same earnestness; they concern all of this age, as well as those of the first, and perchance they are not less seasonable.

O my God! thou wert pleased to create me when I was nothing, to redeem me when I was in
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slavery,

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slavery, to save me when I was lost. My being cost only a *Fiat*; but my redemption was purchased by thy Death. All that I have, is the effect of thy goodness; and all that I am, of thy power. What can I return for such a crowd of favours, but an humble acknowledgment of my unworthiness? but a resolution to devote every member to thy service? I am by thy power, and for the future I will only live to thy honour, that hereafter I may live eternally in thy glory.

GOSPEL of St. Luke, Chap. ii. Verse

1. *And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed.*

2. *(And this taxing was first made, when Cyrenius was governor of Syria)*

3. *And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.*

4. *And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem (because he was of the house and lineage of David)*

5. *To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.*

6. *And so it was, that while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.*

7. *And she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him in swadling cloaths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.*

8. *And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night,*

9. *And*

9. *And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and they were sore afraid.*

10. *And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.*

11. *For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.*

12. *And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swadling cloaths, lying in a manger.*

13. *And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying,*

14. *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men.*

THE MORAL REFLECTION.

AS God created man with one *Fiat*, so might he have pardoned his sin with one, *I will, be thou clean*. Yet he pitch'd upon an expedient, more painful to himself indeed, but more advantageous to men. He made himself man, to expiate man's faults, and espoused all his miseries upon earth (sin excepted) to entitle him to all his joys in heaven. This is a kindness so superlative, that it is no less hard to believe, than to conceive it, did not thousands of martyrs confirm it with their blood, and God by as many prodigies. God seems too high to stoop so low; and man too low to soar so high; but, *with God all things are possible*. We will take a step to Bethlehem: but sense must stay behind; for our eyes will tell us, we see a child, nothing different from others, but that he is more miserable.

Scarce were the Roman wars at an end, and civil dissensions compos'd, under the conduct of the fortunate

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fortunate Augustus, when God, the prince of peace, resolved to unite man's baseness to the immensity of his greatness, and to sanctify by his presence the world, which a continual course of impiety had turned into a den of furies. And now the nine months, since the virgin conceived, were almost expired, when God's goodness took occasion from man's ambition, to make his entrance into the world more glorious, because more abject.

There went out a decree from Augustus Cæsar, that the whole world should be taxed. Augustus commanded all to repair to their respective cities, and register their names, that he might know the number of his subjects, and the extent of his power. And Joseph also went up from Galilee out of the city of Nazareth into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem. Christ would suffer at his first entrance into the world, as well as at his leaving it, and condemn men's pride at his birth, no less than through the whole course of his mortal life.

Had he been born at Nazareth, his mother's cottage had furnish'd him at least a cradle, or Joseph's charity would have made one: he had not wanted the convenience of a fire; his relations, if unable to relieve his wants, had not failed to compassionate his indigence; but being a stranger at Bethlehem, he was sure to be abandoned of all, and to fall under all those extremities that wait on strangers attended on by poverty.

Oh how ingenious is God in finding out ways to suffer for man! And how industrious is man in framing pretexts to suffer nothing for God! One would think God laboured for his own interest, he so earnestly lays hold of every occasion; and we for another's, we are so careless and negligent. The greatest sufferance is too little for his charity, and the least is too great for our lukewarmness; and yet

yet our damnation takes away nothing from his happiness, and our salvation makes no addition to it. He had enjoyed himself, tho' we had lost him eternally; our fruitless lamentations had neither touch'd his heart with pity nor compassion.

Joseph used his utmost endeavour to procure some accommodation for the virgin. But alas! *There was no room in the inn.* Unhappy Bethlehem! Didst thou know who begs admittance, thou wouldst receive him with a thousand *Hosannas to the Son of David*: thou wouldst prevent the suppliant, and intreat him to accept of what at present thou dost refuse with so much cruelty.

We all blame the Bethlemites for refusing so small a charity, and so immense a treasure, and yet a hundred times we have been guilty of the same crime. How often has he sued for a lodging in our hearts? And how often have we put him off with a, *There is no room in the inn.* It was taken up by a crowd of thoughts, some foolish, others vain, and most criminal. There was room for airy castles of grandeur, rais'd in the brain, and gilt with twenty gay illusions of the imagination, for traiterous designs, and lewd intrigues; but no place for seriousness, for sobriety, or the thought of our duty.

But the time draws nigh; nine months hang on a few minutes. The virgin must be delivered: but where? In an abandoned stable, fit only to defend beasts from the scorching sun in summer, and from the nipping frost in winter: here the holy Maid brought forth the divine Infant, and *wrapped him in swaddling cloaths, and laid him in a manger.* Let me cry out with St. Bernard, *Divine Infant! Thou art a King, where is thy palace? Instead of embroidery, nothing appears but either the webs of spiders, or the excrements of beasts. Where are thy gaudy courtiers? Thy palace is an open cottage, thy throne*

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throne a manger, and thy whole retinue Joseph and Mary.

But where are men, for whose sake alone God has cast himself into such an abyfs of abjection, poverty, and indigence? *They slept their sleep*, Pſal. lxxv. 6. They ſeem as little touch'd, as if they had no concern in the myſtery; they lie ſtretch'd out in a deep ſleep, unmindful of their ſalvation, and forgetful of their Saviour; every one courts thoſe vain idols, that hereafter will damn them, without dropping one poor *I thank you* upon him, who has taken ſo much pains to ſave them. One would think the reaſonable part of man was drowned in the ſenſual, or metamorphoſed into marble.

Ah! *It is high time to awake from ſleep*, Rom. xiii. 11. from thy fatal lethargy, and to leave the trance that ſtupifies thy underſtanding. The angels congratulatory acclamations rend the air: be ſo far curious as to enquire what they mean, or at leaſt ſtop not your ears, and you will hear: *I bring you good tidings of great joy, for to you is born this day—a Saviour*. But this harmonious melody had not charms enough to draw men from their beds of down, nor to perſwade them to expoſe their health to the mid-night air; much leſs to enter into a ſtable, where they were ſure to find nothing extraordinary, but want and poverty. But had Auguſtus invited them to Rome, they had poſted thither through a thouſand fatigues, and as many dangers. Such a ſtrange aſcendant have the vain amuſements of this world over the minds of men, and ſo little are they moved by the pains or pleaſures of the other!

How long, unfortunate children, will you ſuffer yourſelves to be deceiv'd by the ſly inſinuations of the world? How long will you doat on thoſe deceitful objects, you muſt either hate here, or will eternally curſe hereafter? You wander in a maze
of

of errors. God is come down upon earth to unmask the impostor, to uncover the cheat, and to secure you from the precipice. You court greatness, he presents you a kingdom; you tire yourself in the chace of wealth and pleasure, he offers those that never glut, that never surfeit, nor ever end. How can you refuse an offer so loving, so advantageous, without renouncing all claims to reason? In short, you must receive the gift, or resolve to live in flames, as tormenting as they are sure to be everlasting.

But, in fine, the poor shepherds only found ears to hear the angelical consort, or at least courage to follow it to the stable. They knew God would protect their lambs from the inroads of wolves, whilst they paid homage to *the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world*. And now, holy shepherds, tell us what have you heard and seen? We have heard the most charming symphony that ever sounded on our mountains, and we have seen the most wonderful Child that ever was born of woman; a true Infant, yet true God; just now born, yet eternal; he warms the seraphims, yet shivers with cold; infinitely great, yet lies in a manger; he made all things, and wants all things; and, what seems most stupendous, not loved by man, for whose sake he embraces this dolorous and forlorn condition. Should we return ingratitude to a friend, who had freed us only from a prison, or made over to us a small estate, we should blush at our ill nature, and all men would repute us monsters. Now, what we possess, is the effects of God's pure bounty. When we forfeited our patent to heaven, he renewed it at the expence of a painful life and of an ignominious death, in the midst of the most excessive torments man could inflict, or hell invent, or nature suffer; and yet we are all ungrateful to so unparallel'd a Benefactor; without remorse, without shame,

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shame, without infamy ; as if the universality of the crime attoned for its heinousness, and that we were all excusable, because not one is innocent.

Prostrate yourself, dear reader, before the manger with the shepherds, and, if you will not thank the Infant for his favours, at least take some compassion of his misery. If you will afflict his soul by your sins, let your breath warm his tender body; there is no fear of a thunderbolt ; his hands are tied ; love has disarmed him, cold benumbed him, and your sad condition has melted his justice into mercy. Perchance, by gazing on his beauty, you may by reflexion behold your own deformity. The tears of compassion, that trickle from his eyes, may wring some of repentance from yours ; and his sorrow for the sins of men, may persuade you to deplore your own.

O my Creator, and my Redeemer ! I humbly prostrate myself at thy feet : I confess I am thy slave, and I vow obedience to thy commands : ask me, *Can I drink of the cup thou art to drink of ?* I will answer, *I can*. I will execute what you command, and will embrace most willingly, and undergo courageously, all those afflictions your providence shall please to assign me. Crown others with roses, reserve thorns for me. I place my pleasure in suffering here with thee, and my only happiness in enjoying thee hereafter : But unless thy goodness supports me, my weakness will cast me down, and all my resolutions will end in smoke. I read in my wicked inclinations the fate of those, who put more confidence in their strength than in thy assistance. Help me therefore, my dear Saviour, that I may prevent, by thy mercy, the disasters that will spring from my infirmity ; that I may cancel, by repentance, the treasons of my depraved nature.

EPISTLE

EPISTLE to the Galatians, Chap. iv. Verse

1. *Now I say, that the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, tho' he be lord of all.*

2. *But is under tutors and governors, until the time appointed of the father.*

3. *Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world :*

4. *But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son made of a woman, made under the law,*

5. *To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.*

6. *And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.*

7. *Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.*

THE MORAL REFLECTION.

THE Galatians, a people of the lesser Asia, embraced the faith with much fervour ; but immediately flagg'd in the practice: for scarce had the apostle turn'd his back, but some converted Jews began to dogmatize, and to teach the people that they must join the observance of the Jewish laws to that of Jesus Christ, if they intended to be saved : They supported their errors with the specious appearance of convincing arguments, viz. The example of the other apostles, who, trained up in the school of Christ, were better inform'd of his mind, than St. Paul, a late convert. These reasons, so plausible, debauch'd the Galatians, and tarnish'd the new received faith ; so that now they were

were become a medley of Jew and Christian; half one, half the other, and consequently in reality neither.

St. Paul, informed of their sudden apostacy, endeavours to disabuse them of the pretended obligation: He protests, the gospel frees men from the slavery of the law, and raises them to the dignity of God's adopted children. He inforces his assertion in the preceding chapter with five convincing proofs, and then strikes the new reformers with an anathema, in spite of their specious arguments. In fine, he wonders, that men, who naturally doat on freedom, and hate subjection, should on a sudden turn so fond of slavery, as to put on the yoke Christ had eased them of, and to hug the chains he had broken.

In the present epistle he prosecutes the same subject, and illustrates his argument by a comparison. Tho' minors are lords of their fathers estate, yet their condition is little better than that of servants, because they depend on the will of their tutors and guardians, and have not power to dispose of any thing till their minority be expired: *The heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, tho' he be lord of all*: So the Jews, under the burthen of the ceremonial law, were in a state of minority, ignorant and unpolish'd, charmed with the temporal advantages of peace and plenty, and almost unconcerned for the everlasting joys of heaven. *Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world.*

But when the time prefix'd was come, God sent his Son to ease the Jews of the ceremonial law, to free them from the slavery of sin, and to honour them with the dignity of adoption. *But, when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law.*

Christ

Christ therefore has knock'd off our chains, and by his blood has purchased us a glorious liberty: yet this privilege must not be stretch'd too far, nor extended to a manu-mission from all subjection: we are no longer in prison, but we are under a restraint: our liberty is encompass'd with precepts; and when we transgress them, we step over the bounds of our freedom; for certainly, when God withdrew us from the observance of the old law, he never intended to exempt us from his own jurisdiction; nor did he free us from sin, to impower us to plunge into licentiousness without remorse, nay without offence: nor did he give us a patent to rebel, when he adopted us into his family. Such a liberty would cast a scandal upon the most holy, and his religion would be no more a preservative against sin, but an incentive to ungodliness.

Yet some have not blush'd to preach, that the very commandments were repealed with the ceremonies, and that Christ's death has placed his followers out of the verge of the decalogue. This ushered into the world the famous *Believe firmly, and give nature line enough*. Let it live at discretion, and charge through all precepts both humane and divine: no sin is damnable, but infidelity. This is to give liberty its full swing, to bid God and goodness defiance, to hew down practice and principle at a blow.

It would be no less scandalous to confute the pretensions to a liberty so flamingly impious, than to pretend to it: it flashes horror and aversion, and curdles the blood of a Christian. We are free, but not from the laws of God or nature: these we are bound to obey, under pain of damnation. Faith is the first step to salvation; but if it be clogg'd with sin, it will never convey us into the eternal mansions of the just. The devils themselves, saith St. James, believe all the mysteries of Christianity as
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well as we ; nay, and tremble before that majesty, which we too often insult : yet their faith will never extinguish those flames that environ them. They cannot believe themselves out of hell, nor we our souls into heaven. *Faith without works is dead*, James ii. 20. and only serves to enhance our ingratitude to God, and by consequence our damnation.

We must fulfil the whole law of Christ, if we intend to be saved, that is, believe the *Credenda*, or *things to be believed*, and practise the *Agenda*, or *things to be done*. There will be no abatement ; Christ has opened heaven-gate to mankind : all may enter ; but with this proviso, that *they stand to the conditions*.

Indeed, had we no support but nature, we might look upon the observance of the gospel as impossible, and heaven as a region above our reach : But God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, *Abba Father*. God hath sent the Holy Ghost into our hearts, whose presence makes us pleasing to him, and enables us at the same time to take possession of the crown he has designed for us. This indeed is not only a favour above our deserts, but an honour above expectation.

What ! man ! the offspring of nothing ! whose body ends in dust, whose soul deserves hell ; raised by his offended Master to the dignity of heir apparent to heaven ! Here is kindness above expression ! above imagination ! Should a prince adopt a peasant ; into what transports of love, of gratitude, would this new elected heir break out ? Would he harbour any thought of disrespect, of disobedience, of disloyalty ? Yet what proportion between the honour Christ has done us, and the greatest, the most mighty emperor, can confer upon a subject ? For here one man adopts another, both in nature equal : the difference lies without, and the advantage is the gift

gift of birth, or perchance of tyranny and oppression. He intitles him to a kingdom ; yet this vast all is greater in appearance than reality ; the lustre outshines the value. Men may strip you of majesty, and death most certainly will. It makes you great ; but not good : it only serves to enlarge your desires, to enliven hope, and awake fear : it may render you most miserable, and cannot compleat your happiness.

But God is as much above man, as an infinite Being is distant from nothing ; he has raised us from the dust to the inheritance of an empire, which once possess'd can never be lost. And the conquest is certain, if we employ those arms God has put into our hands. Had he intrusted our fortune to the management of another, tho' our friend, we might doubt of the success : he might betray our interest either by infidelity, incapacity, or negligence. But, to secure us, God has made us masters of our own fortune ; we carry our destiny in our own breasts ; nothing can defeat our victory but ourselves ; for in this case to will seriously, is to overcome.

And yet we miscarry thro' our own fault and misconduct, and because neither the world, the flesh, nor the devil, can disappoint us of our pretensions ; in spite of nature and interest we turn traitors to ourselves, and sling up our claim to heaven for a trifle ; we spurn at our benefactor, despise his kindness, and break through all the conditions, that found our title to happiness.

O my God, open my eyes, that I may see the greatness of thy kindness, and the monstrousness of my ingratitude : thou hast made me thy Son by adoption, and I have play'd the prodigal, debased my dignity, and pawned my inheritance for a bauble ; and what remains of my past follies, but a mortal regret for having offended so loving a Father, so stupendous a Benefactor ? I am unworthy

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to bear the title of son ; nay, that of a slave surpasses my deserts. I prostrate myself at thy feet, and only sue for pardon.

GOSPEL of St. Luke, Chap. ii. Verse

33. *And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him.*

34. *And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel ; and for a sign which shall be spoken against :*

35. *(Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.*

36. *And there was one Anna a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser ; she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity.*

37. *And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years : which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.*

38. *And she coming in at that instant, gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.*

39. *And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth.*

THE MORAL REFLECTION.

THIS gospel informs us of Christ's oblation to his eternal Father in the temple, of Simeon's prophecy and publick confession, together with that of Anna the prophetess. He had promulged his birth in a stable to the shepherds by the harmony of angels ; now he declares himself in the

the temple by an immediate revelation, and puts an end by a miracle to holy Simeon's expectation and wishes. And thus he confirms, what God pronounces by the mouth of his prophet, that *he bears the prayers of the righteous*, and grants the requests of those, who continue them, with confidence and perseverance.

God commanded, in Leviticus, that every male child should be offered to him by his parents, after the mother's purification. By this precept he would oblige us to acknowledge our dependance, and teaches all parents, that he is the author of their children, and their last end; and by consequence, that they betray their duty, if they neglect to train them up in his service from the cradle. We have no other business but to serve God here, and to enjoy him eternally hereafter. This therefore requires all our care, and *always*. We cannot begin this great affair too soon, but may too late.

Parents therefore are bound to imitate Joseph and the Virgin Mary, that is, to devote their children to God from their most tender years, to instill (if possible) piety into their breasts together with their nurses milk, and to persuade them to practise virtue, so soon as they are able to know it. I fear, many parents suffer for their childrens sins in the other world, as well as for their own; they educate them in their families, like the *children of tribute* in the Grand Seignior's seraglio, without any principles of piety, nay, and of religion also. At the age of fifteen, they are often strangers to their end, as well as to their beginning, and know no more where they are to go, than from whence they came. Nay, did they grow up without principles, one might say, at least in some measure, their education is good, because it cannot be worse; but alas! the impiety of the father often tinctures the males; and the pride, vanity, and indevotion of the mother,

corrupt the females. So that almost all are poisoned in the nursery, and in a manner carry the mark of reprobation on their foreheads, before thoroughly capable of sinning; for children ape their parents, and seldom disapprove those actions of their superiors, that take off restraint, and give liberty to their growing passions.

It is therefore the parents duty, in the first place, to bar ill objects from their childrens sight, and much more not to set them patterns of iniquity. If they are resolved to damn themselves, let them at least have so much compassion for their off-spring, as not to plunge it into the same misfortune by their example. Let them keep the plague to themselves, and not scatter the contagion in the family. Those things we learn first, are the last forgot, and Aristotle gives this reason, *because they take possession of the soul*, before it be crowded with other notions, and so sink deeper into the brain, and leave more durable impressions; and because, on the one side, children are apt to learn, and, on the other, so disposed to remember, he banishes not only obscene representations, but even tragedies, from a well ordered commonwealth, that neither love-intrigues, nor examples of tyranny and revenge, may come within sight of children: for they plant ill seeds in their tender breasts, which will spring up in time, and smother all principles of godliness. And if this pagan philosopher, who had an imperfect view of virtue and vice, in relation to the other world, would not allow youth to be present at the stage-entertainments of Greece, which notwithstanding were unblemish'd, if compar'd with the lewdness, the blasphemies, and irreligion of ours; those christian parents stand guilty of a sin of the deepest die, who not only permit, but encourage their children to frequent the theatres, where all impiety treads the stage with applause and reward,

reward, and virtue with reproach and punishment; where love is worked up to the highest excess under the disguise of gallantry, and pride is recommended under the false notion of greatness; where the worst things are said, and the best abused. It is true, tho' the poison be drunk off, it works not immediately: the passions are callow, and reason only in the down; but when they are fledged by age, when youth instills into those drowsy monsters warmth and vigour, and the animated species of lewd representations play in the imagination, what an uproar will they not raise in young people's breasts? and how strongly will they solicit them to doat on those things that shine with such a charming lustre in their fancy? Now when reason is weak, and temptation strong, when objects please, and glide smoothly upon sense, passion will run away with duty, unless sound principles interpose, and call all the terrors and joys of the other world to their assistance. And when once youth is deeply entered in sin, there is no return. Therefore, *train up a child, in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.* Prov. xxii. 6.

Secondly, Parents must not only remove ill objects from their childrens sight, but also cultivate their nonage with christian principles both of belief and practice. *Hast thou children? instruct them, and bow down their neck from their youth,* Eccclus. vii. 23. Then they may be moulded into any shape; they lie under no prejudice, no preingagement: they are not gone over to a wrong interest, nor bias'd by the weight of ill habits. In fine, their souls are a meer blank; you may write on them *devil* and *angel* almost with the same facility. And as an early virtue is easily acquired, so also is it durable and permanent; for, in fine, experience teaches us, as well as scripture, that the first loves and aversions sink so deep, that they interweave

themselves with our very nature, and cannot wear off without much time, and more violence. So that if we devote the first fruits of reason to piety, we shall probably continue the practice. Young people's lives are generally of a piece; the last scene is a copy of the first, and the exercises of our old age are modelled by those of our youth.

Take a youth, who has divided his time between the study of virtue and learning: who fears more a barbarism in manners, than a solœcism in Latin; who lends not an ear to lewd discourses, nor suffers his tongue to pronounce them; who rates innocence above friendship, and God's holy grace above pleasure; take such a youth, I say, and place him at the head of a numerous family; it is odds but his youthful piety will influence his riper years; for let the world throw before him a thousand snares, he will find eyes to see them, and courage to break through them. Let flesh prompt him to unlawful pleasures, he will rest content with those that are permitted, because he knows that a satisfaction, purchased by sin, is only a sweet poison, that charms the palate, and kills the soul: a short folly, accompanied by a long repentance, and too too often by an eternal despair.

But if we shift the scene, if we suppose a youth, trained up in the loose principles of the times; who knows the duty of a Christian, no better than he practises it, and owes all his religion to the climate, or baptismal font; thus equipt, let us settle him in the world. Will he reform? It is odds he will not; the change of state will make no alteration in his behaviour, unless it be to plunge him deeper in the mire of corruption. The ill habits, contracted in his youth, hang heavy upon him; passion runs high, pleasures court, and parasites adore him; and when liberty and an estate come in, able to support the expence of vice, what can be expected but debauchery?

bauchery? *His bones are full of the sins of his youth, which shall lie down with him in the dust,* Job xx. 11. And in all probability his soul will feel the punishment of them in hell.

Let therefore parents cultivate betimes their childrens minds with wholesome instructions, and balance the wanton inclinations of their nature with sound principles of religion and morality. When once they are engag'd in vice, instruction comes too late. It is strange and amazing, that Christians should be so pressing and solicitous about the temporal advantage of their children, and so indifferent, so unconcerned, for their eternal. At the very birth, they begin to lay in provisions for their establishment; they assign them a post, and train them up for the employment. Some are form'd for the court, others for the camp, and others for the bar. Dancing and fencing-masters, Littleton and Cook are provided; but no preparation for heaven; and yet our all depends upon it. Tho' we leave the world as insignificant, as we came into it, known by few, or despised of all; if we secure heaven, our fortune is made: heaven is our end, our final happiness, and virtue alone leads us thither. Why then are we taught so soon all arts besides that of living well, which notwithstanding is the one thing necessary, the only thing deserving our knowledge and our application?

Simeon, who for many years had panted after the coming of the Messias, and spent his days in wishes, was led into the temple, by the Holy Ghost. The same moment, the Child Jesus was carried in by his parents. *And he came by the Spirit into the temple, and—the parents brought in the Child Jesus.* Thus God crowned this good man's desires, and rewarded his perseverance: he was grown grey in expectation, and had almost out-lived hope. But his wishes
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were granted, when they seemed desperate. So true it is, God never abandons those, who place their confidence in him ; and, if he defers to grant their petitions, it is either to add heat to their fervour, or wings to their hope ; or to enhance the favour, by granting it, when least expected ; or, if he complies not with their demands, they may be sure the refusal is a benefit: they ask, what an enemy alone would grant.

No sooner had Simeon received the Child into his arms, but he took his farewel of life, and sung his last. *Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace,* ver. 29. I have beheld the object of my wishes, and embraced it ; my desires are at an end ; nothing remains now, but to leave this world, and to expect his glory in the other.

The very touch of this divine Infant inspired him with the gift of prophecy : He foretold the persecutions of the Son, the superlative grief of the mother, and the ingratitude of mankind. *Behold this Child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel.* This is strange ! Does he not say, *I came not to judge the world, but to save it ?* John xii. 47. Yes ; but alas ! in spite of his mercy, we force him to employ his justice, to punish us more than others, because he has lov'd us more. How many refuse to acknowledge him for their Saviour ? and how many seem to confess his divinity, merely to prophane it with insult and outrage ? They treat him, now glorious in heaven, with less respect than his enemies on earth ; they transgress his orders, as if he had no authority to command, as if he were too weak to punish, and too poor to reward. This unwarrantable conduct defeats the designs of his mercy, and provokes him to damn us, altho' he gave up his body to the cruelty of men, and fury of devils, for our salvation.

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And thus, at the same time, we verify to a tittle the other part of Simeon's prophecy, *and for a sign which shall be spoken against*. For this is not to be understood only of the Jews, who opposed him living, nor of the Pagan tyrants, who persecuted him dead, but of Christians (which is strange) who contradict his doctrine, and revile his Person. For, tho' we receive it in speculation, we condemn it in practice, and our manners favour much more of the Alcoran, than of the gospel.

And thus we disgrace his sacred Person, and deliver it up to the raillery of Pagans, and blasphemies of Mahometans. For what infidel, by the conduct of Christians, would not judge their law a nuisance to society, and a shame to human nature? that its author was some prostitute, some *banditto*, who gave protection to crimes, and impunity to the most flagitious criminals. For what sins are almost possible, that are not visible in the practice of Christians? And how can an infidel presume, their law preaches up the most refined morality, when the far greater part of its professors are stained with vices, and stigmatized with the most flaming impieties? Thus we decypher the Saviour of mankind as the destroyer of it, and the most Holy as the most flagitious.

O my divine Redeemer, tho' I bow to thy divinity, I have abused thy favours, and traduced thy Person by disobeying thy commands: I have joined with the crowd in demanding to crucify thee; and, tho' I pretended respect, have outraged thy goodness with a thousand indignities. But I put, from this instant, an end to my crimes, to begin the practice of my duty. Tho' I fear thy justice, I confide in thy mercy, and hope, by a sincere repentance, to turn thy coming, not to my ruin, but to my resurrection.

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I stand after Epiph: —

EPISTLE to the Romans, Chap. xii. Verse

1. *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.*

2. *And be not conformed to this world : but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.*

3. *For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think ; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.*

4. *For as we have many members in one body, and all the members have not the same office :*

5. *So we being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.*

THE MORAL REFLECTION.

MAN is compounded of a body and a soul : that casts him on the same level with the vilest insect ; this places him but one degree below the angels. We stand indebted to God's goodness for both : that he framed out of pre-existent matter ; this he created of nothing. We are therefore God's, in the most strict sense of property : he is our Maker, our Lord, our *Alpha* and *Omega*, our *Beginning* and *End*. These prerogatives intitle God to every action of man ; and if we dispose of them in favour of any creature, we are guilty of theft and sacrilege. St. Paul therefore, with reason, exhorts the Romans to discharge this debt ; to devote to God's service every motion of the body, every act of the soul,

soul. *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.* And at the same time he points at the manner how this sacrifice must be made, that it may become pleasing to God, and advantageous to ourselves.

First, it must be a living sacrifice. We must not massacre our bodies, as the Jews did their sheep and oxen, on the altar; much less must we imitate the folly of those deceived Christians mentioned by St. Austin, who, taking the words of our Saviour in too literal a sense, laid violent hands upon themselves, and so outraged the laws of nature, under pretence of keeping up to those of the gospel, and died *felones de se*, out of a fond desire of expiring martyrs. We must indeed throw up our lives, when we cannot prolong them without a crime: but no circumstance can justify self-murder. The meaning of the apostle therefore is, that we must mortify our bodies, but not burthen them; we must leave them strength to discharge the functions of nature, but (if possible) not enough to run away with reason: we must diet them into obedience, and keep under our vile passions, by the severity of sobriety and discipline: we must not only refuse them the satisfaction of those pleasures that are unlawful, but sometimes of those that are permitted: for, tho' it be no sin to grant nature what is lawful, it is a virtue to deny it; and it is more easy to keep it within compass, when we tie it up short, than when we let loose the whole line of duty.

Secondly, The sacrifice must not only be living, but also holy. When we practise virtue, our conscience must stand clear of mortal sin. This is a requisite so essential, that without it the most darling virtues are adulterate, and of no value in the sight of God; they are, in the apostle's phrase, mere *sounding brass, and a tinkling cymbal*, bright without

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without, and rusty within. In fine, they are all shew, all surface, without value, without solidity. Tho' a sinner makes over all his estate to the poor, and throws his body into the flames, *if he has not charity, it is all nothing*. If his soul be stained with sin, and stripp'd of grace, he may indeed be admired and praised by men, (who judge of things as they appear, not as they are) but will never purchase one grain of glory in heaven.

I would have those Christians pause a moment upon this great truth, who sleep whole years in sin, with such an unconcernedness, that one would fancy they had forfeited not only reason, but even sense, with their innocence : for besides a thousand dangers of perishing eternally, that hover about them every moment, they spend their time without profit, and labour without hope of a reward ; they acquit themselves of the publick duties of religion ; they frequent the church, assist the poor, and protect the orphan : yet these offerings are so far from flying up to God, in the odour of sweetness, that they turn his stomach, to come near the scripture phrase. If therefore we have the misfortune to fall into God's disfavour, let us by an unfeigned repentance close the breach immediately : suffer not a moment to pass between the fall and the rising again. Whilst we are at variance with God, we cannot be true to our own interest : for, in fine, tho' we undergo the mortifications of the most severe recluse, we shall be at all the expence of virtue without purchasing it ; we shall bear the fatigue and reap no benefit : for God rewards only the labours of his friends, not the actions of his enemies.

Thirdly, Our obedience must be reasonable ; conformable to the strict dictates of well guided reason : for whatever thought or action swerves from this rule, is defective ; and consequently cannot be virtuous. Hence, in the practice of moral virtues, you must

must keep a mean ; extremes are vicious : measure your charities not by fancy, but prudence. You must consider your own abilities in the distribution of alms, as well as your neighbour's necessity, and not impoverish your own family, to supply the wants of another ; you must neither overcharge nature with excess, nor let it pine away with indiscreet abstinence. Not to allow it enough, is no less criminal, than to overlay it with abundance. Screw not up religion to superstition, nor let it run into libertinism. You may sin against faith, by believing too much, as well as by believing too little ; and misconstrue Christian morality by a too rigid severity, no less than by a too remiss indulgence.

Be not conform'd to this world ; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind. This is not a counsel, but a precept, laid on all mankind by Christ himself, whilst he conversed with us. *Love not the world.* And the knowledge and practice of it is of such importance, that St. Paul inculcates it in almost every chapter of his epistles. We must model our actions by the maxims of Christ, if we intend to be saved, and square our conduct by the pattern he has set before us : now, white is not at greater variance with black, nor heat with cold, nor hell with heaven, than the principles of Christ with those of the world.

Our Saviour commands us, not only to pardon our enemies, but to love them, to return favours for affronts, and good for evil ; to be humble in the highest station, and content in the lowest ; to rate afflictions above prosperity, and pain above pleasure : in fine, to save our soul we must hate it, and war upon ourselves, to be in amity with God.

Now, the world steers by another compass : it encourages revenge, and brands meekness with infamy and reproach ; rage and resentment are deified ;

fied ; blood, murder, and barbarity are canonized, and heroes and outlaws undistinguished. Pride goes for greatness in its dialect, humility for meanness ; and who dares not charge through thick and thin, through all the laws of justice, good nature and humanity, to preferments, is voted low-spirited, a man without honour, without generosity ; in fine, it claps good names on ill things, and ill on good, to bring Christian virtues into contempt, and Pagan vices into esteem. We must therefore be *transformed in the renewing of our mind*, that is, we must renounce all the corrupt principles of the world, and take up those of Jesus Christ, and shew by our practice we are disabused. If we follow the world, we shall certainly meet with disappointment here, and with flames hereafter.

But if we intend to go on in a constant and steady course of virtue, we must lay a deep foundation of faith : this is the *primum mobile* of our actions ; it awakes our fear, and raises our hopes. Whosoever believes firmly a good life will be rewarded, and a bad one punished, will hardly fling up his pretensions to future glory, for a fleeting criminal pleasure in hand, much less for hell in reversion : but, if he wavers, he will scarce baulk appetite, and forego present satisfaction for a faint expectation of the future.

Learn therefore why you believe, as well as what, and owe not all your religion to your nurse or parents. But observe, St. Paul lays down this caution ; *For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, according as God has dealt to every man the measure of faith.* We must be wise, but not over-conceited of our wisdom ; for a pretension to knowledge, that is above us, is downright folly.

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I am thine, O my God, by as many titles as I have members in my body, or powers in my soul; and by consequence, thou hast a right to every motion of the one, and to every act of the other. But I have misapplied thy gift, abused thy favour, and turned the instruments of thy glory and my salvation, to thy dishonour and my ruin. I have offered up my body to lewdness, drunkenness, and intemperance; my soul to pride, vanity, and ambition: but I detest my past ingratitude, and promise an entire fidelity for the future; I devote myself wholly to thy service; I will employ my memory in reckoning thy benefits, my understanding in comprehending them, and my will in loving so great a Benefactor.

GOSPEL of St. Luke, Chap. ii. Verse

42. *And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem, after the custom of the feast.*

43. *And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it.*

44. *But they supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance.*

45. *And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him.*

46. *And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them and asking them questions.*

47. *And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.*

48. *And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing,*

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49. *And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?*

50. *And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them.*

51. *And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart.*

52. *And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.*

THE MORAL REFLECTION.

OUR Saviour had, for the space of twelve years, shut himself up in a little cottage, unknown to all but Mary and Joseph. Then he left his retreat to comply with the law, *Every male child shall appear before the Lord three times a year, Exod. xxiii. 17.* When the ceremony was over, *the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem, and his parents knew not of it.* By this first publick action of his life, he has left a standing precedent to all mankind, that it is not only lawful, but obligatory, to break through all the ties of flesh and blood, of friendship and consanguinity, when God's glory and our duty call upon us. This God declares in *Deut. xxxiii. 9. Who said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him, neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children: they have observed thy word, and kept thy covenant.* And Christ himself assures us by words, as well as practice, *he that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me.* Whosoever postpones God's favour to that of a creature, and parts with his allegiance, to comply with a friend, is unworthy of the name of a Christian.

This truth is too manifest for a proof; his greatness, and our dependence, challenge a preference:

we stand indebted to his power for our being, to his goodness for our redemption; from his mercy we expect a heaven, from his justice we fear a hell. His love will make us eternally happy, and his hatred perpetually miserable. And yet, how often, to please a companion, do we despise this great Being, condemn the best friend, and exasperate the most dreadful enemy? Our sins sit uneasy upon our conscience: grace throws before us a dismal prospect of the future: we are within an ace of our conversion; but alas! a companion interposes; he summons us to a rendezvous: not to appear uncivil, we accept the invitation; and so play, drink, and debauch away, not only the desire, but the very thoughts of pardon. But this is to mistake breeding, and to confound it with frenzy and madness. People are not so condescending, as to divest themselves of their estates upon a point of ceremony and civility. They prefer lordships to friendships, and will not part with them for a smile, or a frown. Why then do we give up heaven with such ease? Is it below an estate? or less valuable than a manor? are the consequences of poverty more terrible, than those of God's displeasure? A creature's friendship will do you no good, if you are in sin; nor his hatred harm, if you are in the state of grace. A rake may burlesque your conduct, lampoon your virtue, and turn your person into ridicule; but satire from such mens mouths is all panegyrick. He who is applauded by the saints, and admired by the angels, neither fears the reproaches of fools, nor needs their encomiums.

Christ's parents supposed he was in the company of his relations; but towards night they perceived their error, and immediately returned in search of him to Jerusalem. By every mortal sin we lose Jesus, and the whole train of those favours, he has purchased for us by the labours of a painful

life, and the dolours of a cruel death ; and nothing can renew our claim to his kindness, but a return to his mercy by a speedy repentance.

And here we must imitate St. Joseph, and his Virgin-mother, who sought him with speed, concern, and sorrow. *We have sought thee sorrowing.* We must seek him by repentance, if possible, the very instant we lose him by sin, and not suffer a moment to intervene between our rise and our fall. For, in fine, every minute may be our last ; so that to defer repentance one moment, is to expose our soul to an eternity of despair.

Yet, tho' wretched sinners see the danger, they sleep, not moments, but years, in their sins ; as if the loss of God were a thing below our concern ; nay, and below our thoughts. Were our souls indeed no longer-lived than our bodies ; did they vanish into nothing, when we breathed our last ; that Epicurean maxim, *Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die*, would not, perchance, be quite unreasonable ; or were we sure to-morrow would be the fatal day, we might to-day put hell to the venture, and to-morrow prepare for heaven. But alas ! tho' we are certain we once must die, we are ignorant when. Tho' perchance our last glass is turned ; perchance the first time I shut my eyes, may be the last ; perchance I may never unclothe them, but to see strange flames ; nor return to my senses, but to feel them ; nor to my wits, but to deplore my folly, for having deferred my repentance till it becomes immortal, and by consequence insignificant and unprofitable ; yet I am stupid and insensible.

Some interpreters wonder why Elias, pursued by the cruel ministers of enraged Jezabel, instead of withdrawing himself into the hidden retreat of some obscure cave, laid himself down to sleep in the open air, 1 *Kings*, xix. 5. But where is the wonder ? The prophet knew he slept under the protection of the

the omnipotent ; that more angels watched for his guard, than persecutors for his destruction ; that he only could lose his liberty in a dungeon, or his life on a scaffold : but it is stupendous, that sinners can sleep in the very arms of Dalilah, surrounded by as many dangers as they have committed sins, pursued by as many executioners of God's justice, as there are devils in hell, who only expect his sentence to arrest their souls, and to confine them to more formidable prisons than those of Samaria : one would think human nature incapable of a stupidity so unreasonable.

They endeavour indeed to cast some tolerable varnish on their folly, nay and to give it the turn and air of wit. How many (say they) are not arrested by death on the sudden ? nay, how many pass through a course of pain and languor before they depart ? why then must I swell the number of the surprised ? Is it not strange, that men of parts, of wit, and perspicuity, cannot see through the fallacy of this wretched sophism ? and, if they do, is it not more amazingly wonderful, they will swallow the illusion, tho' they smart eternally for the imposture ? Should they not turn the argument the other way, and take it by the right handle ? Many are snatched away in the midst of their guilt, so that there scarce intervenes a moment between the crime and the punishment ? why then not I ? am not I exposed to all the casualties of human nature ? has God issued out a patent of exemption, in my favour, from apoplexies, and suffocation ? have I been more grateful to him for his benefits than others, or less criminal in my conduct ? alas ! I have scarce given any proof I believ'd a God, but when I blasphem'd his majesty, and ridicul'd his most tremendous attributes. Have not I postponed his commands to those of my passions ? and scrupled more to check my appetite, than to commit a sin ? ought

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I not therefore to apprehend the most severe punishment his justice has laid on others? This discourse is more reasonable, I am sure, and more secure. How many poor creatures have argued themselves into hell with this; *Why should I be taken off on the sudden, rather than thousands that are not?* But, in fine, many have been, and so may you: it is therefore dangerous to fall into sin, and a madness to sleep in it.

When one of Joseph's brethren was condemned to stay in Egypt, as an hostage, all melted into tears. The common sophism, *Why should I be the man?* was unable to stop their grief, or to calm their trouble. The sentence pronounced in general alarmed every one: yet what could they fear, but a short banishment, a long restraint, or, at most, a painful death? Good God! how preposterous are our proceedings? we sob, we weep, we move heaven and sometimes hell, to wave a temporal misfortune: but if the question be to ward off a blow, that wounds mortally and eternally too, like men struck with an universal palsy, we open our eyes to see the danger; but have neither legs to fly the peril, nor courage to resist it. Like the wild bull, mentioned in the prophet Isaiah, chap. li. we sleep in the very snares of our enemies, with this only security, *Perchance God will give me time to repent.* Thus we venture an eternity upon one cast of a die, upon a wretched *perchance*, upon a moment that never will be at our disposal!

When the plague invades a town, good God! how are we alarmed? Some retire, others arm themselves with preservatives; all break off commerce, and bid adieu to conversation. Balls, comedies, entertainments, cease; pleasure gives place to security. Why all this ferment? all this hurry? we fear death. Shall the fear of death over-power our inclinations to pleasure, and damnation be regarded

garded with unconcern ? with insensibility ? Is the death of the body so great an evil, that it deserves to be avoided ? and that of the soul so inconsiderable, that it is below our thought ? Oh ! in how unequal scales do we weigh temporal misfortunes, and eternal ! we cast all our care upon things that deserve contempt, and refuse a thought to those that call for our whole application.

Seeing therefore God has prepared a hell for the impenitent, and a heaven for the contrite, sleep not one moment in sin : to-day it is in your power to obtain pardon ; perhaps to-morrow may lay you under a fatal necessity of despair. Did ever patient forbid the doctor to prescribe a medicine, till the disease was grown too strong for physick ? poor sinner ! you are sick, and sick to death : God prescribes repentance, as an infallible restorative ; you are not yet disposed to take it : no, to-morrow will be time enough ; that is, perchance, when there will be no time for you ; when your doom is pronounced, and the sentence of damnation is irrevocable. Is the loss of a short life of more concern, than an eternal death ? Why then did Christ free us from this, at the expence of his blood, and leave us under the tyranny of that ?

Joseph and the Virgin returned immediately to Jerusalem in search of Jesus. Tears, sorrow, and sollicitude accompanied them : and yet they spent three days in the search. *After three days, they found him in the temple.* And, if it be so hard to find him, when lost without fault, how hard must it be for sinners to find him, who have lost him by their crimes ? notwithstanding the difficulty, we often by dilatory put-off's reserve sickness for the search, to wit, a time when we are unable to do any thing ; when the disease has exhausted our spirits, weakened our brain, and almost eclipsed reason : yet in this hurry, in this state of languor

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and imbecillity, we pretend to find Jesus ; I mean to repent seriously, to detest our darling vices, to hate what he forbids, to love what he commands ; in fine, to be all pleasure one moment, all mortification the other ; profane this instant, pious the next ; and in one minute to be a madman, and an hermit. These changes are not wrought so soon. The passage from one extreme to the other is long ; it requires grace and time, a hazardous contest with flesh and blood, and a glorious victory over Satan. I know it is possible : but whosoever embarks his salvation upon a bare possibility, runs great hazard of a shipwreck.

O my God ! thou wilt not the death of a sinner ; and therefore, if I miscarry, my ruin must lie at my own door. I resolve rather to forfeit my life, than my innocence ; but if, through weakness, I offend thy goodness, I will hope in thy mercy, and never provoke thy justice by procrastination. Who defers repentance, endangers his salvation : to refuse pardon when offered, is the shortest way to die without it.

EPISTLE to the Romans, Chap. xii. Verse

6. *Having then gifts, differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith :*

7. *Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering ; or he that teacheth, on teaching ;*

8. *Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation : he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity ; he that ruleth, with diligence ; he that sheweth mercy, with chearfulness.*

9. *Let*

9. *Let love be without dissimulation, abhor that which is evil, cleave to that which is good.*

10. *Be kindly affectioned one to another, with brotherly love, in honour preferring one another.*

11. *Not slothful in business : fervent in spirit ; serving the Lord :*

12. *Rejoycing in hope ; patient in tribulation, continuing instant in prayer :*

13. *Distributing to the necessity of the saints ; given to hospitality.*

14. *Bless them which persecute you : bless, and curse not.*

15. *Rejoyce with them that do rejoyce, and weep with them that weep.*

16. *Be of the same mind one towards another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.*

THE MORAL REFLECTION.

SAIN**T** Paul compares the church to a natural body ; and, as this is composed of divers parts, to which our Creator has assigned different functions ; so in his mystical body (the church) Christ has appointed different orders, or classes of men, and cut out their employments ; that the one not interfering with the office of another, peace, order, and decency may be preserved, and by consequence a just subordination, which makes up the perfection and happiness of society : some are empowered to explain the scriptures, and preach the word ; others to assist the poor with seasonable alms, and the sick with christian exhortations : In fine, he has drawn up a scheme of the duty both of lay-persons and ecclesiastick, and prescribes a short method to every different order in the church ; that all may acquit themselves with advantage of the functions proper to their station.

First,

First, *He that ruleth, with diligence*; he that has care of souls, must discharge his office with all diligence, pain, and sollicitude; as he sits in the place of Christ, so he must propose to himself his zeal for a pattern: it is a post of merit, if well complied with, and subject to great inconveniences, if neglected: he must not flatter the rich, nor overlook the poor; those are not above his care, nor these below it; he must instruct both in their duty, and persuade them to practise it by all the arguments of love and charity. He must pretend to no other interest but the good of his flock, but to labour in this world, and to expect his reward in the other: for whosoever is a slave to profit, will betray their souls, who are able to improve his fortune, or to sink it. He will wink at their vices, to court their favour, and barter both conscience and character for a benefice.

Secondly, *He that sheweth mercy, with chearfulness*. In the primitive church deacons were intrusted with the distribution of those alms, the faithful laid at the apostles feet, for the relief of their necessitous brethren. It was their duty to visit the sick, to enquire into the necessities of the faithful, and to proportion their contribution to every one's circumstances. Here the apostle prescribes the manner of their behaviour in the discharge of their office, *with chearfulness*. They must rejoice, that God presents an occasion of exercising charity. Who gives an alms, receives a greater; so that he obliges himself, more than the receiver; for what he gives is temporal, but the return is eternal; so that he neither spends his labour, nor his money *gratis*; but lays out both to interest, and God engages for the reimbursement. Christ assures us, that whosoever, out of a motive of charity, visits the sick, or the prisoner, or even gives a cup of cold water, shall not fall short of a reward.

This

This joy must flash in our faces, and sit on our mein and behaviour; an open countenance and a free air shew we esteem it a favour to confer one; a smooth face prompts people to disclose their miseries, and a frowne to conceal them. A man, who fears a repulse, will stifle his want, and rather suffer with patience, than sue for a relief, that at once forces him to blush and tremble. Enquire therefore into your neighbour's condition with charity, compassion, and cheerfulness, that, by this easy and winning conduct, you may gain their love and confidence: for the very suspicion of being thought poor, oftentimes weighs harder on some people, than poverty itself; and many chuse rather to starve in silence, than to purchase a supply at the expence of their credit and reputation.

Your speech must be no less winning than your behaviour, and your words must relieve, as well as your purse. Insult not over a poor creature, but compassionate him; censure not his conduct, tho' it threw him into want; but pity his misfortune. Some will not part with a penny, till they have hung a poor creature on the tenters, and rack'd out a confession of his miscarriages. One would think he stood at the bar before a judge in commission, he is so cross-questioned. Why all these formalities? If he has brought himself into want by mismanagement, prodigality, or debauchery; what is that to you? he committed the fault, and feels the punishment. Add not confusion to want; and let him not buy a small relief at the price of a mortification.

The apostle, having instructed the clergy, directs his discourse to all Christians; *let love be without dissimulation*: let not your kindness sit only on the tongue, but lodge in the heart; it must not be confined to civil expressions, but stand the test of actions. Fine words often veil traiterous designs; nor

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is it a new device to present the olive of peace with one hand, and a dagger with the other. You must do your neighbour all the good you can, and when your circumstances permit you not to do more, at least desire it. One of the most pleasing sights to the very angels, is a man, who does good and bears evil, and scorns to revenge ill turns, but by good ones.

Abhor that which is evil, cleave to that which is good. Altho' you love your neighbour's person, you must hate his vices; for these being offences against God, have nothing amiable, but that they may be cancelled by a sincere repentance. Remind him therefore of his duty and of his danger, and apply the most convenient remedies charity can suggest to his distemper, and never flatter his lewdness out of a view of any petty interest or favour.

Not slothful in business. Give assistance to your brother, not only with care and diligence, but also without intreaty or procrastination. A benefit, received without asking, is doubled, because it relieves necessity, and costs not the very shame of asking. And then, if it comes in the very nick of time, it is tripled. Some put off their charity till their neighbour be undone, like the fountain of Narny, which never flows, but at the approach of famine: they are willing to set him again upon his legs, but not to withhold him from falling. But physick comes too late, when the patient is past cure: when a poor man's fortune totters, it may easily be supported; but when it is fallen, it is hard to be rebuilt.

Rejoycing in hope. St. Paul means not that we must hope, with pleasure, for those things that are sinful: a son must not wish his father's death, that he may enter upon his estate, and live at large without restraint or dependance; nor a lewd debauchee
success

success to his criminal Intrigues. It is monstrous to rejoice at the expectation of crimes, and a pleasure calculated for the damned. If our hope soars not up to heaven, at least let it not sink into hell. If it is not divine, let it not be inhuman.

St. Paul will have us wean our thoughts from the expectation of worldly amusement, and place our joy in the sole hope of heaven. And certainly, as the conquest of this happy kingdom is an enterprise worthy of a Christian, so the hope of success cannot chuse but be a subject of joy. What content do men draw from the prospect of a transitory and inconsiderable preferment? what pleasant, what gaudy landships does it paint in the imagination? it sends joy through every limb; and the very hope of being great and happy, affects more than greatness and happiness themselves. For worldly goods charm at a distance, and surfeit when enjoyed: the possession comes not up to our expectation; it wears off the imposing varnish, and represents things in their native deformity. If, notwithstanding, the hope of these toys is able to overset a man with joy; what transports ought the hope of heaven to raise in the soul of a Christian, whom God, in spite of his baseness, has raised to so vast, so noble a fortune?

In this happy region will I lodge my thoughts; my treasure lies above the stars; my heart shall accompany it: I hope for nothing in this world (my God!) but thy assistance, and fear nothing but infidelity to thy grace. But, as you give me power to overcome my enemies and your own, so I beseech you, by the merits of your Son Jesus, grant me an entire victory.

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GOSPEL of St. John, Chap. ii. Verse

1. *And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there.*
2. *And both Jesus was called, and his disciples to the marriage.*
3. *And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto them, They have no wine.*
4. *Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come.*
5. *His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.*
6. *And there were set there six water-pots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece.*
7. *Jesus saith unto them, Fill the water-pots with water. And they filled them up to the brim.*
8. *And he saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governour of the feast. And they bear it.*
9. *When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was (but the servants which drew the water knew) the governour of the feast called the bridegroom :*
10. *And saith unto him, every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine, and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse : but thou hast kept the good wine until now.*
11. *This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory, and his disciples believed on him.*

The MORAL REFLECTION.

THE most palpable errors have always had the fortune to find some abettors. Mens understandings are as lawless as their wills ; and as no command

command can constrain these, so few truths are able to subdue those. Good is the object of the one, truth of the other: yet evil runs away with that, and falsehood with this. And tho' it be easy to see through the cheat, they rather chuse to be imposed on with pleasure, than to be at the trouble of tearing off the deceiving disguise. What can be more clear than that marriage is lawful? nature proclaims it, and the very author of nature made the first marriage in paradise. Yet in the very dawn of Christianity, there sprung up Gnosticks and Manicheans, who oppos'd it, and, which is strange, whilst they contemned wedlock, they canonized lewdness, as if pleasure were unpalatable, unless sinful.

To stop the mouths of future hereticks, our Saviour would be present at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. It is unnecessary at present to prove a truth no Christian calls in question; but some instructions cannot be unseasonable to those, who either are, or intend to engage themselves in this holy state.

Marriage is like courts; men never live content in it, and seldom satisfied out of it. Scarce is the nuptial knot tied, but they wish it broken. Yet no sooner are they at liberty, but, by a new engagement, they put on new chains, as if they placed their pleasure in repentance, and all their satisfaction in despair.

God made the two sexes, not only as a means to propagate the species, but also for mutual support and content: but, as our disorders have almost turned all God's blessing into curses, and by ill usage inverted the design of the whole creation; so they have abused this divine institution, and metamorphosed wedlock (intended for our happiness) into a state of slavery and bondage. I confess, as it is now managed, matrimony is a soil fertile in thorns,
and

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and if a rose appears once in an age, it is almost a miracle. In the spring indeed, some false pleasures spring up; but in the summer, you see repentance; in the autumn, calamities without number, troubles without end; and in winter, nothing but despair. Men lay all the disorders at the womens doors, and these at the mens; but in truth both are guilty; they enter upon the state hand over head, without prudence, and so live in it without satisfaction. The very seed of discord is often sown before the contract is finish'd, and if thorns are planted, what hopes of gathering grapes?

Interest alone for the most part has the management of all matches: reason has seldom a vote, or even a place in the consult; and, what is worse, the parties themselves often chuse (as well as contract) by proxy: they are sold by their parents, by inch of candle, to the highest bidder; affection, piety, good-nature, parity of age, are only flung into the scales, when the ballances hang even; one thousand pounds more atones for one thousand ill qualities; and as many good ones make no compensation for a penny less. In fine, matrimony is a fair, where rational creatures (like beasts) are rated, and sold to the highest bidder. We live no more in an iron age; Saturn's golden days are returned, and Christians adore calves (if made of gold) as well as the Israelites in the desert. Conscience, religion, happiness in this world, together with that in the other, are squared by the only rule of interest. Let a lady possess all the advantages of her sex, if her portion comes not up to her endowments, she may die a vestal. So that men court not women, but money; and should therefore be married to the mountains of Potosi, or to the diamond mines of Golconda. What wonderful misfortunes wait on marriages, struck up upon so unchristian a view as avarice? Money may purchase grimace, but not affection.

fection. Hearts are given, not bought: it may gild aversion, but cannot stifle it. Love often ends in disgust, and you may as soon strike fire out of ice, as love out of hatred.

Others take counsel merely of the eyes; they run to matrimony (like Turks or Saracens) to gratify passion. But alas! this sense is unfit for the employment; it only skims the surface, and hovers about colour and figure: now a fine complexion is not always the index of a fair disposition, nor charming features of a beautiful soul: tho' she be angel without, she may be fiend within. A tempestuous heart often lies under the cover of a serene face, and ill nature under that of a smooth brow.

But besides, love, that goes no farther than the skin, is short-lived; for, barring casualties, it withers within a few years, and sets in loathsome deformity; and then, when the cause of love ceases, love must expire, or end in aversion; for there is seldom found a mean between a great love, and an extraordinary hatred.

But again, if the husband has small means, and the wife no portion, if children increase, poverty will grow upon them, and cares will multiply with the family. Now in this perplexity, the romantick passion will flag, and necessity will furnish leisure to survey their folly with coolness and temper; then one lays the fault on the other, accusations thicken with complaints, and these degenerate into coldness, and end in disgust; patience is the only remedy for such diseases; yet it is never applied.

Pitch therefore upon the best methods prudence can suggest, when you make a choice: what cannot be undone, must not be done without caution: when the obligation runs for life, consultation and prudence must be proportioned. Parents have no right to awe and menace children into matches (for which they have a mortal aversion) merely to

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support

support a sinking family, or to improve its revenues; and children have no obligation to plunge themselves into misfortunes, out of complaisance to interested parents: satisfaction on foot is preferable to discontent in a coach and six, and a small estate with pleasure, to a dukedom with chagrin.

But if parents must not force a child's inclination, a child must not fail to ask their advice. Nature demands this duty, as well as prudence: they are supposed to be better acquainted with the world, to have entered further into people's constitutions, and to be less subject to oversights. Besides, in an advanced age, passion is more cool and sedate, and by consequence more fit for deliberation; whereas youth is green, giddy, headstrong, and hurried on by rashness: so that both duty and interest oblige young people to consult their parents, before they conclude a business of so great concern.

Enter upon marriage like a Christian, not like a Turk, or savage Indian. He, who begins it irreligiously, will continue in it with infidelity. God will scarce drop a blessing on that couple, that engages with a curse.

Obedience is the first duty of a wife. *Let the wife see that she obey her husband*, says St. Paul; and that of the husband a tender affection for his wife. *Husbands, love your wives*. He must cherish her as his companion, not treat her as his slave, and use his power with sweetness, not empire. Seeing nature has made woman a subject, she reverses the order of providence, if she contends for sovereignty: and if she has a mind to command, the surest way is, to obey.

Tho' we love not always those we admire, we admire always those we love; for love is founded in some excellence, either real or imaginary; and when this opinion ceases, love takes wing, and flies away. Now because the liberty of a married state, and
continual

continual conversation, discover faults on both sides, each must look on the perfections of the other, and contemplate those through magnifying, the other through diminishing glasses. In this case, artifice is wisdom, and to over-reach one's self, prudence; and remember you are in this world, where evil waits on good, and thorns spring up with roses: every plant has its worm, every beauty its spot, and the most accomplish'd creature its imperfections; men and women without defects are only found in heaven among the blessed.

Never break out into mutual reproaches: these fling oil upon the fire, and make faults where there were none; a kind remonstrance well-timed may do good; but a peevish reproach will certainly do harm. Civil wars (they say) are more mischievous than foreign; but domestick are more troublesome than both; for when both parties are far engaged, there is no retreat; the war runs on for life; hostilities may cease for a time, but peace is impracticable. Love once disjointed is seldom set right.

Fidelity is an obligation equally extended to both parties, and cannot be broken without two crimes, impurity and injustice. Tho' the husband be superior, he is subject to this duty; for sex can be no warrant for a crime; nay, in some manner, the obligation lies heavier on him, because his reason is supposed stronger, and his passions weaker: and besides, being head of the family, he must instruct it. Now a husband never teaches chastity more effectually than when he keeps it.

As modesty is the greatest ornament of a woman, so chastity is her obligation also; and if she keeps clear of foreign love, she will be fenced against all temptation. She must therefore guard her senses; for the poison that infects the heart enters in at these avenues. Let her not lend an ear to courtship, nor receive flattery without disdain: these discourses,

like magical charms, raise the devil of love, that virtue will scarce conjure down : they light a fire that will burn her heart in this world, and perchance her soul in the other. She must not make visits alone : had Eve been in Adam's company, the serpent would not have attack'd her, or at least not defeated her innocence. Who intends no evil, fears not a witness.

Beware of jealousy : they say, this monster is the child of love ; I am sure it is the mother of a thousand furies that haunt wedlock, that make both parties miserable, tho' both are innocent ; it claps both upon the rack, and condemns both to the drudgery of a common centinel : like toads or scorpions, they turn all into poison. Every cast of the eye, every gesture, every word, are misconstrued ; every action passes for intrigue, artifice, and treason. These people must be strangely averse to quiet, who court so foolishly discontent, and weary themselves in quest of that they fear to find.

The one must have confidence in the virtue of the other, and not suspect the least infidelity, till they have just reason. Women are often worse for being suspected bad, but seldom better. It is a terrible temptation to give a husband just grounds for jealousy, who is jealous upon supposed ones. Revenge has a strange ascendant over the sex, if injur'd ; and God send it commits not often real crimes to avenge affronted innocence. The husband must not bar her a decent freedom : she may be gay without being wanton, and merry without offence. Some grains must be allowed youth, constitution, and quality : and let him take this for a maxim, that some women will live virtuously in company, and others viciously in retirement and solitude.

In a word, many inconveniences attend the state; some may be avoided by a prudent forecast, and others ought to be supported with patience. Providence always intends good, and often permits evil, either to punish our sins, or to polish our virtue.

EPISTLE to the Romans, Chap. xii. Verse

16. — *Be not wise in your own conceits.*
 17. *Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.*
 18. *If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.*
 19. *Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay it, saith the Lord.*
 20. *Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him: if he thirst, give him drink. For in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.*
 21. *Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.*

THE MORAL REFLECTION.

THE apostle here, as well as in other places, forbids us to be wise in our own conceit. But why does he insist so much on this argument, and give all Christians this universal *Caveat*? Nature and experience seem sufficiently to convince men, that their knowledge is confin'd to a very narrow compass, and that they are scarce certain of any thing, but that they know nothing.

However, the apostle had reason to check our pride, and to persuade us to a mean opinion of our abilities: For tho' the wisest man living is not he who possesses the greatest share of knowledge, but who is guilty of the fewest follies; yet we have such a

dency to pride, such a bent to think kindly of ourselves, that tho' we have no remarkable qualities but ignorance and folly, yet we turn the false end of the perspective, and so represent our advantages too great, and our failings too little, nay, and mistake folly for wisdom. Now an humble conceit of our parts can do us no harm; but an over-weening dotage on our wisdom and prudence may push us into the greatest extravagancies: for he, who rates his knowledge above its value, is either foolish or proud. Now it is hard to determine in which state a man is capable of greater miscarriages. Ignorance may indeed excuse before God the oversights of the one, and vanity inhances the mistakes of the other.

A man, smitten with too favourable an opinion of his merits, renders himself importune in conversation: he plays the tutor, and tops it in all company; he sets up his judgment for the standard of wit; and nothing must pass for sense, that is not stamp'd with his approbation; whereas the very pretension to such a station is ridiculous and unchristian, and it renders a man both contemptible and cheap. The greatest wisdom is publickly to affect none, to suspect our own lights, and to consult others. If we take not care, self-love will over-reach prudence, when we act for ourselves; and the most unreasonable conduct will appear judicious, if it flatters our interest.

But the apostle's caution regards chiefly our *eternal salvation*. *Be not wise in your own conceit*. For the natural effect of too great a conceit of our learning, is, to usurp the post of censor-general, and to condemn whatever suits not with our fancy. We continually (even in matters of religion) appeal to reason; but we always mean our own: so that our single judgment must be imposed on mankind, as the sole scale of truth and falsehood; as if we were pri-

privileg'd creatures, and had a patent of infallibility, and that error was intailed on all the world besides.

When pride meets with some learning, and a slender insight into religion with a vehement inclination to immorality, it hurries us God knows whither. We cavil at forty things in religion, and, like the Jews and Gentiles in St. Paul's time, regard some mysteries as foolish, and others as scandalous.

Some, when they have railed at one religious ceremony, and smiled at another, suppose they have proved them idle and useless to demonstration. To what purpose (says one) so many fasts? Virtue consists not in abstinence from meats, but from sin. Feasts displease others: they are (forsooth) grievances to the poor, and restraints to the rich.

But these people should reflect on St. Paul's advice: *Be not wise in your own conceit*. They are too wise in their own eyes, and too criminal in God's. From disapproving one practice of the church, there is but a short passage to condemning them all, and from glancing at ceremonies, but a step to questioning articles. Some do not relish this doctrine of St. Paul: they fancy it stifles thought, checks learning, cramps the understanding, and imposes dulness on mankind. For all that, if we turn our knowledge against our quiet, and salvation, I think it is no great advantage to be *wise in our own conceit*. But St. Paul incroaches not upon wit, but only discountenances the abuse of it. If you have wit, why must you have no religion? Are these two things incompatible? But the misery is, those, who take the most liberty to carp, are the least fitted for the scandal; they are men generally of bad morals, friends to ease, and enemies to constraint; they cannot distinguish reason from illusion, and so mistake the best of natural things for the worst. Is it reasonable for a man (full of himself) tho' he

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knows

knows little or nothing of religion, to condemn or glance at those venerable customs, those decent ceremonies, piety has instituted, and the whole church has approved and practised? Is it reasonable to question the points of faith, revealed by Jesus Christ, received by the better part of mankind, defended by the most learned pens of the world, and sealed with the blood of a million of martyrs? Who can in prudence oppose to such an authority his own reason, which has nothing great but presumption, and nothing certain but illusion? I know some people pretend they are in jest, and give a little liberty to their tongue, to sport their wit, and breathe their talents; but for all that, to ridicule religion in jest, is to sin in earnest. Can nothing polish wit, but sacrilege? or will it languish, unless inspirited with blasphemies? This is somewhat strange! I thought a man might be witty and innocent; that he might discourse well and live better: but, in short, no pretext can excuse the action; it is offensive to God, and scandalous before men; it leads first directly to libertinism, and then to atheism. *Be not (therefore) wise in your own conceit; but argue a little with yourselves thus: The most reasonable part of mankind, for seventeen ages, has not only believed the same Creed I do, but revered the ceremonies, for the most part, the church at present practises. If all my forefathers were in an error, and the whole visible church; how can I pretend to certainty? Is my reason less subject to illusion, or more assured of infallibility? What am I to an Austin, a Chrysostom, a Gregory, and a thousand others? What a madness is it then to abandon such an authority for my single reason, sway'd by passion, and blinded by immorality and ignorance? It is true, some treat religion with as little respect as myself; but who are they? Men of bad lives and worse principles, full of pride and void of merit, of*
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little conscience and less learning, rich in words and poor in sense, unable to distinguish raillery from reason. Is it credible, truth should desert so many persons, eminent for learning, and venerable for sanctity, to lodge with rakes and beaux, that have nothing remarkable but pride and temerity? In believing the tenets of the Christian Church, and practising its precepts, what inconvenience can arise, unless you reckon it a misfortune to be a man of probity, to cherish holy thoughts, to do good actions. But if I live half libertine half Christian, I shall probably die (as I liv'd) quite impious. Tho' all religion were imposture (which is impossible) Christians would have this advantage, That they act like men, and deserve a reward in the next world, tho' they should find none.

O my God! let me *not* be wise in my own conceit, but in thine. I confess it is the greatest wisdom to suspect our own lights, to esteem all men but ourselves. I was born in ignorance, as well as in sin, and to this very moment have augmented both. I am an America, an unknown region to myself, ignorant of what passes within me: how dare I therefore question thy mysteries, which soar above reason? It is enough for me that thou hast revealed them, who canst not impose on me. I will therefore believe all that thou hast revealed, and endeavour, by the assistance of thy grace, to practise what thou commandest.

GOSPEL of St. Matthew, Chap. viii. Verse

1. *When he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him.*

2. *And behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.*

3. *And*

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3. *And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will, be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.*

4. *And Jesus saith unto him, See thou tell no man, but go thy way, shew thy self to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.*

5. *And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him,*

6. *And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented.*

7. *And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him.*

8. *The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.*

9. *For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth: and to another, Come, and he cometh: and to my servant, Do this, and he doth it.*

10. *When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no not in Israel.*

11. *And I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.*

12. *But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

13. *And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way, and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the self-same hour.*

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THE MORAL REFLECTION.

THIS passage of St. Matthew's gospel proposes two miracles; first, the cure of a leper; *And behold there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.* Our charitable Saviour immediately stretched out his hand, and with one touch restored the suppliant to perfect health; *And Jesus put forth his hand and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean: and immediately his leprosy was cleansed:* this poor man acknowledged Christ's power; *Thou canst;* nor did he doubt of his will, but of his own unworthiness to receive the favour; and therefore did not presume to solicit for a miracle; but opening his misery to Christ, he left the event wholly to his determination, *If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean;* your power is infinite, nor is your goodness less: I fling my self therefore into your arms; I commit my self to your disposal; I neither ask a continuation of my disease, nor a delivery from it. If you think fit, I will receive health with joy, or bear my distemper with patience.

This is a rare lesson for all Christians, how they are to behave themselves in their addresses to God; it is a pattern, by which they must draw up their petitions, when they sue for any temporal blessing: first, (like the leper) they must approach God with veneration and respect. *There came a leper and worshipped him.* This debt we owe his majesty, and the state of a suppliant demands it. Secondly, They must acknowledge his power. He, who made all things of nothing, can dispose of nature as he pleases; he can raise the dead, as well as strike dead the living, and with the same facility cure diseases, as cause them. *If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.* In fine, all the goods of nature
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and fortune, are the pure effects of his goodness; and the evils, of his permission. His will to do us good is as boundless as his power. *He, who hath given us his Son*, says St. Paul, *how shall he not with him give us all things?* if we ask what becomes his goodness, and what clashes not with our salvation?

When we approach God with these dispositions, we must leave the success of our prayers to his determination, and expect his pleasure, not only with patience but indifference; that is, we must not urge our demand with importunity, as if we intended to tease God into a compliance, but receive a grant or denial with the same cheerfulness; for oftentimes it is a greater favour to refuse our petitions than to grant them; and he obliges us more when he strikes, than when he heals us.

For alas! we are so great strangers to our own constitutions, so ignorant of the nature of things, that we know not what is beneficial, what is hurtful to us. We mistake serpents for fish, and poison for a cordial. Poor Rachel was inconsolable, when she saw herself without children, and concluded she could not survive the mortification of barrenness; *Give me children, or I die*. But fecundity, which she supposed would prolong her life, abridged it. She thought she could not live without issue, and she died because God made her fruitful. How many, impatient of pain, cry out for health? of poverty, for wealth? Yet those groan under a continuation of their disease, and these of their indigence. Hence they repine at providence, and complain that heaven, which is all bounty to others, is as hard as brass to them. But these people should consider, that the granting of their request would perchance be a punishment, and the denial a blessing: those may abuse health, and these money, to their damnation; for it is certain, most men live better,

better, when they are upon the point of dying, than when they enjoy health and vigour, and few people mend their lives with their fortunes. The afflicted leper laid open his misery with this indifference, and received a cure, for his modesty; *And Jesus put forth his hand and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.*

But if we must never petition God for a temporal blessing without this *proviso*, *If it will conduce to his glory and our salvation*, we must not however permit such a reservedness to accompany our prayers, when we implore his mercy, and sue for pardon of our sins. It is not sufficient to tell him, with the leper in the gospel, Lord, if you please, you can cure the diseases of my soul; but we must importune him with prayers and tears, and implore his divine assistance with fervour and perseverance. For tho' temporal blessings may turn to our disadvantage, spiritual ones cannot. Pardon of our sins reconciles us to God, renews our lost title to his promises, and sets us in the way to heaven, which is the end of our creation, and of Christ's sacred passion.

Say not, *I want grace* to break the chains that bind me to sin, to disengage my will from those charming objects that hamper it. This is a mere pretext; and to say, you cannot pray, or cannot repent for want of grace, is to encrease the catalogue of your crimes with heresy. He, who wrought a miracle to cleanse a leper, will he refuse his help to those, who make their addresses to his mercy, for a cure of their souls? no certainly; his commands are not impossible; he always gives force to comply with the most opposite to flesh and blood, when he imposes them. It is inconsistent with his goodness to punish a poor creature for what he cannot help, but not for what he will not do;
indeed

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indeed he requires our co-operation: for, as St. Austin says very well, *He who made us without our concurrence, is notwithstanding resolved not to save us without it.*

Open therefore all the diseases of your soul to him, who with so much chearfulness cured those of the body. Tell him, with the holy sisters of Lazarus, *He whom thou lovest is sick.* He, whom you have loved to such a point, as to take upon you the baseness of his nature, and in the end to die by his cruelty, is not only sick, but dead to your grace, dead to your love, and by consequence alive to all the tortures of a guilty conscience, and (unless your mercy interposes) to all the pains of the damned. And as this poor leper heard, *I will; be thou clean;* you will hear these comfortable words, *This sickness is not unto death.* This mortal distemper of the soul is not unto death eternal, but an argument that God's mercy exceeds man's wickedness; that it can forgive more crimes than we are able to commit; that it never refuses grace to those who ask it with earnestness and importunity, nor pardon to those, who sue for it with true sorrow and unfeigned repentance.

Our Saviour ordered the leper to conceal the miracle; *See thou tell no man,* Matth. viii. 4. But alas! the poor man was so transported, that, unable to confine his joy within his own breast, he proclaimed the favour, together with his Benefactor. By the prohibition of Christ, we are taught to beware of vanity; and by the divulging of the miracle, gratitude. Christ commands us to conceal the charities of our right hand from the knowledge of our left; that is, to condemn to secrecy all our virtues, that, being out of the reach of vanity, (which often follows virtue as well as vice) we may expect a full retribution from God alone.

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Yet, tho' it be the duty of a Christian to hide the favours he does his neighbour, and to wish them unknown to all but God; however, gratitude always obliges the receiver to acknowledge, and sometimes to proclaim them. It is a shame to be ashamed of a favour, and a crime to fly from a benefactor, as if his presence reproached either our necessity or our ingratitude.

The second miracle was the cure of a Roman captain's servant. There came to him a *centurion*, beseeching him, and saying, *Lord, my servant lieth at home, sick of the palsy*. He addressed himself to our Saviour with such a confidence, earnestness, faith and humility, that altho', according to the received maxim, *A wise man admires nothing*, the incarnate wisdom marvelled, and said to them that followed him, *I have not found so great faith, no not in Israel*. This Roman convert was so solicitous for the health of his servant, that he undertook the message himself: he besought our Saviour not to stoop so low, as to enter into his house, unworthy to receive so great a Guest. He told him, his power was as able to work at a distance, as near; and that his word was no less efficacious, than his presence: *But speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed*. The priests joined their prayers to the centurions; they pleaded his merits, that, tho' a Roman, he loved the nation, and that his piety went so far as to build a synagogue at his own expences, Luke vii. 5. But this new profelyte would neither pretend merit, nor allow of the commendation: they obtruded these without his consent, and made his panegyrick, against it; he sued for a favour, not for a reward; *Lord, I am not worthy*; and had recourse to our Saviour's bounty, without pretending any obligation of justice; and for this reason he immediately

ately received this gracious command, *Go thy way, and, as thou hast believed, so be it done to thee.*

Nothing moves God more to confer favours on men, than humility. He stoops (saith St. Austin) to the humble, and flies from the proud. Alas! we had no right to *be*, much less to any thing besides. Our sins are our own, our virtues his; for he both gives the power, and the will, to do good. And tho' we should arrive at the supreme pitch of Christian perfection, yet we must confess we are unprofitable servants. When therefore we ask a favour, let us first acknowledge our unworthiness, and then urge Christ's merits as a motive, but never plead our own; those indeed are persuasive, and God seldom refuses the favours we beg in his name, unless it would be a punishment to grant them.

But who is the person, for whom the centurion intercedes with so much earnestness? A servant. This example of tenderness in a soldier for a poor domestick, that lay under the pains and impotence of a palsy, condemns those Christians, that treat their servants as Pharaoh did the Jews, overload them with burdens, work them down, and then take no more care, either of their bodies or souls, than a Turk does of his slave in a bagnio.

They look upon them merely as beasts of burden, made for drudgery; and persuade themselves, Job's aphorism, *Man born to labour*, marks the very end of their creation. But after all, the master and the man, the lady and the maid, are but different pieces of the same clay; they were cast in the same mould, and so the one can pretend to no natural superiority over the other. Nature has placed them on equal ground; the whole advantage arises from money, or title; and perchance from fraud, and circumvention; and in this case, in the judgment of God, an innocent slave is ten times more

more noble, and more valuable, than a guilty emperor. But besides, we are all brethren in Jesus Christ; he shed as many drops of his blood for poor Lazarus as for the mighty Dives, and has purchased as good a title to heaven for the meanest, as for the most exalted mortals. Now all these relations deserve a tenderness, nay, and impose a strict obligation on masters to treat their domesticks with kindness and charity.

They are in some sort their parents, as well as their lords; and for this reason, the very Pagan Romans called them *Patres-familiás*, *Fathers of the family*. Now the alliance between masters and servants being so near, and founded in religion as well as nature itself, should they not regard them rather as relations, than as slaves, or creatures of another species?

I know this hinders not a master from exacting a servant's duty; he is taken into the family to work, not to play. But then he must not be overcharged; nor spend his blood, together with his sweat, in your service. Again, you must pay him his wages, and not withdraw it to spend it on hounds and horses, or to throw it away on luxury and finery. The sweat of the poor is unfit nourishment for beasts; and, I assure you, neither your stable, nor your kennel will thrive upon man's flesh. God's curse will fall heavy upon both, and, in all probability, may take in your whole family and estate.

Nor must you brow-beat a poor creature that asks his wages, as if he put an affront on your person, or became importunate for a mere gratuity. He is guilty of an injury, who with-holds a stipend; not he, who demands his due. He requires the price of his fatigues, and you are obliged to return it as a strict debt, not as a free gift.

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When a servant is sick, you must not turn him over to the hospital, nor suffer him to struggle with his infirmity, without any care or concern for his recovery. Christianity instils more charitable principles ; it commands us to assist the necessitous in general, and, by consequence, much more those who depend so nearly on us, and have lost their health in our service. *Do as you would be done by*, is the voice of nature. Let masters consider how they would desire to be treated in their servants circumstances, and then let them shew the same tenderness they would expect and desire.

Turn not upon the common an old crazy domestick, because he is unfit for future service. This is to imitate those barbarous Indians, who expose their decrepit parents to the cruelty of lions and tygers. Let not interest prevail against charity, nor the principles of avarice against those of religion. He is worn out in your service, and has spent his sweat and strength in your family ; it is just therefore to support his drooping old age, and to enliven the remains of those spirits he has lost in your service.

But if masters must take care of their servants bodies, they must be sure not to neglect the welfare of their souls. As these are more valuable, so their care must rise in proportion. Masters must therefore see, they are instructed in the duties of a Christian, and command their practice : they must not so overcharge them with labour, as to allow them no time for their devotions : they have a duty to pay their Maker, as well as their lord, and that must take place. Let a servant be never so useful, if he be a debauchee, turn him off. He will spread the infection in the family ; and besides, he, who betrays his duty to God, is seldom faithful to his master. Encourage virtue, and shew, that the only way to enter into your favour,

is to practise it; and when servants know, godliness alone opens the way to your favour and preferment, few will go over to vice.

O most merciful Saviour! I come, in company of this poor leper, to throw my self at your most sacred feet. Behold, O Lord, my soul, covered over with the leprosy of sin; but I know, *If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean*; and I also know, *that thy mercies are over all thy works*. Stretch forth then, O Lord, thy merciful hand, and touch my soul with the healing balm of thy divine grace, that I may be cleansed from all spots of sin. I must own with this good centurion, that I am unworthy *thou shouldst come under my roof, but speak the word only, O Lord, and my soul shall be healed*.

EPISTLE to the Romans, Chap. xiii. Verse

8. *Owe no man any thing, but^a to love one another: for he, that loveth another, hath fulfilled the law.*

9. *For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thy self.*

10. *Love worketh no ill to his neighbour; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.*

The MORAL REFLECTION.

THE apostle, in almost every chapter of his epistles, repeats the doctrine of *love one another*; and seems to place the perfection of Christian morality

morality in the observance of this precept. *Love therefore is the fulfilling of the law.* But he only copies the original his great Master left him. For indeed our Saviour has promulged this law with such an emphasis, that he seems to have designed it for the distinguishing mark of his religion. In the first place, he commands us to love God ; in the second, our neighbour ; and if that takes the first place of all the divine and natural precepts, this takes the second.

And that his followers may be persuaded to live up to the very height of the precept, he first proposed his heavenly Father's example, who divides with an equal hand, the common benefits of nature, between his friends and enemies, commanding the sun to pour down his benign influence on the sinner, as well as on the saint ; and then concludes with this exhortation, *Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.* As if the observance of this law alone comprised the sum of Christian perfection.

St. Paul seems to have understood our Saviour in this sense. For, *Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, &c.* And if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.* And St. John continually held forth on this subject ; *Brethren, love one another ;* and when so frequent a repetition disgusted his audience, he stopped their complaints, with telling them, *It was our Saviour's own command.* Without brotherly love you cannot discharge the duty of a Christian, nor fall short of your obligation, with it. The primitive Christians were so nicely scrupulous in the practice of this virtue, that one heart seemed to enliven all their bodies, and one soul to preside over all their actions : *They were of one heart and one soul,* says the text. Acts iv. 32.

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So that the very heathens, who hated their religion, admired their union ; and the most judicious among them were forced to confess, that nothing but a divine hand was able to strike such a heavenly concord out of such a jarring discord of complexions, constitutions, and interests. But this golden age soon vanished, to make room for another of steel. For scarce was the name of Christian taken up, but that of brother was laid aside. *Meum & tuum, mine and thine, Frigidum illud verbum, that cold word*, as St. Chrysostome terms it, conjured up from hell disputes (till then) unknown in the Church : these drew in parties, and then hatch-ed factions ; and then such a deluge of vice broke in upon the Church, that the only visible difference between the infidels and the faithful, was, that these professed a more pure and holy religion, and those practised less blameable vices. And when Christians thus changed their manners, the idolaters altered their judgment, and inferred from the practice of Christians, that their profession was rather a mystery of iniquity than of godliness. Thus the infamy of our lives stigmatizes the sanctity of our faith, and Christ himself receives insult and outrage from those who adore him, as well as from those who blaspheme him.

But however, tho' Christendom blush with the blood (not of martyrdom) but of war ; tho' private families are rent with feuds and enmities ; tho' the royal law, *Love thy neighbour as thy self*, be repealed in life and practice ; yet it stands in force in scripture ; nor can either numbers or custom justify the breach of it ; *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy strength : and thy neighbour as thy self*. As your Maker's excellence exceeds all bounds, so your love to him must surpass all measure. Nor must the kindness you owe your neighbour be

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confined to a less compass, than that you bear your self. You must not indeed forfeit your peace with God to buy his friendship, nor damn your soul to save his : it is not love, but madness, to send a neighbour to heaven, and ourselves to hell. And lest the devil and passion might restrain the word *neighbour*, as the Jews did, to friends and relations ; our Saviour has extended it to the whole race of mankind : whoever bears the impress of God on his forehead, tho' he carries the image of the beast in his soul, is still our neighbour : neither distance of place, nor length of time, can wear off the relation, nor affronts or injuries annul the obligation.

Some pretend, this precept only forbids hatred ; but this is an error that bids defiance to the text, Love certainly is not a mere negative ; to wish a neighbour well, implies something more than not to wish him ill ; and there is a very material difference between doing a good turn, and not doing an ill one. St. John, in his first epistle, chap. iii. 14. tells us, that not only he, who hates his brother, sins mortally ; but also he, who refuses his love ; nor must this love only dwell on the tongue, or sit on the lips ; forms of courtship, vain offers of service, or empty promises, cancel not the debt ; it must lodge in the heart, and stand the trial of actions.

You must *cloath the naked*, Isaiah lviii. 7, feed the hungry, assist the widow, and protect the orphan ; and, when you cannot avert a misfortune, you must assuage the pain first by liberality, and then by counsel and compassion ; and, if the wound be too deep to admit of human remedies, apply divine ; persuade him to bear his cross like the *good thief*, with resignation to the orders of providence, not like the *bad one*, with despair and blasphemy. No man's station raises him above this obligation,
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and no man's misery flings him below it. The inequality of birth, title, and equipage, makes none in nature: the prince and peasant are of the same species: the sovereign on the throne is both neighbour and brother to the beggar on the dunghill.

Now, because this precept runs high against the stream of flesh and blood, Christ promises to receive the observers of it among the number of his favourites; *By this shall all men know, that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another*, John xiii. 35. To this he adds a beatitude; *Blessed are the peace-makers*, Matth. v. 9. and then declares them sons of the Most High, and heirs apparent of heaven: *for they shall be called the children of God*. Then he turns to threats, that those, whose stubborn hearts will not bend to allurements, may at least be broken by menaces; so that all men may be drawn into love, either by the hope of reward, or fear of punishment. It is therefore our interest, as well as our duty, to love our neighbour, not only if he be our friend (which is at best a Jewish virtue) but also if he be our enemy; *Love your enemies*; for without this there is no salvation: for our Saviour commands us to sacrifice all resentment to love, before we make our offering at his altar; otherwise, tho' we invoke him in our prayers, we shall call down upon our heads (what Jacob only apprehended) a curse in the place of a blessing: And for this reason, in that very prayer Christ was pleased to teach us, he orders us to implore God's mercy, with this proviso, that *we shew mercy to our neighbour*. So that to beg his pardon, and refuse ours, is in reality, tho' in terms of respect, to play with his mercy, and irritate his justice. In how dangerous a situation therefore is their salvation, whose very repentance deserves chastisement, and whose endeavours to appease

God's anger, serve only as new provocations to inflame it!

But the fear of hell is too low a motive for a Christian virtue : he, who can only be scared into his duty, by the sight of fire and brimstone, has more of the beast than of the man. If Christ died for our sins, he lived three and thirty years for our example ; and this we must imitate, if we intend to be his disciples. Now, if we cast one transient glance upon his whole conduct, we shall find he practised this virtue as strictly himself, as he commanded us. With one *I will*, he might have closed up the breach our sins had made between heaven and earth. His heavenly Father could not refuse what he had the goodness to ask. But he resolved on a more stupendous method ; he would assume the very nature of his Father's enemies, and of his own, to mediate their pardon, and to give them his life for a model, and his blood for a ransom. The greatness of his love overpowered the justice of his resentment. He laboured for his enemies, as if his happiness depended on theirs, and that he could not enjoy peace himself, till he had made up theirs with God. He walked through towns and villages, *doing good*, dropping as many favours as he took steps, and receiving affronts in the same proportion. Yet, to demonstrate, that his love surpassed man's malice, he pardoned all their barbarity was able to commit. And, tho' he knew his readiness to forget past offences would tempt his enemies to new insults ; yet he drew motives of love from their very hatred, and resolved either to tire their malice by patience, or to win their hearts by importunity, or to lose his life by their fury. The pressing invitation of Abgarus to Edeffa, where he would have been adored as God, could not withdraw him from Judea, where he was contemned as the last of men. All motives of his

his own security gave place to those of love: in a word, he made use of their greatest crime to purchase their greatest good, and reconciled them to his Father by his death, in spite of their endeavours to render the breach eternal, and all reconciliation impossible.

And shall Christians despise his command and his example, from whose mouth they must once hear either that dreadful, *Depart ye cursed*, or that thrice comfortable, *Come ye blessed of my Father!*

Good God! To captivate the heart of a wretched creature, what assiduity! what courtship! what baseness! We study her nature, pry into her inclination, espouse her aversions; we proclaim her virtues, and conceal her vices; in fine, we rack ourselves, and displease a hundred, to please her caprice. And for what? For a shameful passion, that is our executioner here, and will be our hell hereafter: and yet for Christ no man will move a finger; his commands are slighted, as if he either were too tender-hearted to avenge our disobedience, or too impotent to punish it. Neither his love is able to allure us, nor his threats to fright us into our duty.

O my Redeemer! let me fear nothing but to offend thee, nor love any thing but thee, and all creatures in thee, and for thee: let me look on my neighbour as thy image, and love him as my brother, whom thou hast bought at the price of thy blood, and raised to the highest pitch of glory, by thy own abasement.

GOSPEL

GOSPEL of St. Matthew, Chap. viii. Verse

23. *And when he was entred into a ship, his disciples followed him.*

24. *And behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves; but he was asleep.*

25. *And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us : we perish.*

26. *And he saith unto them, why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm.*

27. *But the men marvelled, saying, what manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?*

The MORAL REFLECTION.

THIS passage of St. Matthew's gospel opens a scene of an enraged sea, of a bark almost overfet, of the apostles trembling with fear of a shipwreck, and of our Saviour sleeping in the face of danger : *But he was asleep.* This sudden tempest, our Saviour's sleep, and the miraculous calm, contain great mysteries, say the Fathers. First, They demonstrate Christ's divinity : for who can stop the fury of those ungovernable elements, and controul the fixed laws of nature, but he who made it? *What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?*

Secondly, They reveal the mysterious conduct of providence over those, who bid adieu to the corrupt principles of the world, to square their lives by those of Jesus Christ. For no sooner do they fall off from vice, to enter into the interest of virtue, but all things seem to conspire their ruin : temptations crowd in upon them ; crosses overwhelm them ;
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disappointment follows all their undertakings ; rail-
lery strikes at their wit, calumny at their reputation ;
Behold there arose a great tempest in the sea. Hurri-
canes blow down their houses ; diseases carry off
their cattle ; and, to copy Job's life in all its cir-
cumstances, they are often struck with incurable
diseases, and so die to all satisfaction, to live a prey
to pain and misery. Whilst they sided with the
world, they sail'd down the stream ; every one a-
dored their fortune, and envied their happiness : in
fine, prosperity seem'd the reward of their de-
bauchery, and adversity the recompence of their
virtue. This conduct of divine providence star-
tled David. And thousands of apostate Christians,
for this very reason, have charged God's adorable
essence with either impotency or tyranny ; impo-
tency, if he was not able to protect his servants,
and, if he was able, tyranny, for tormenting them
like criminals, who were guilty (say they) of no
other crime, but of serving him with fidelity and
exactness. But those people neither live, nor rea-
son like Christians. He, who permits the tempest,
to try his disciples virtue, can with one word allay
it, and render this calm as wonderful as the storm,
and proportion their reward to the danger.

To wipe off the accusations libertines charge on
providence, I suppose (what we all believe) that
man survives the grave, and was made to labour
here, and to enjoy God eternally hereafter. This
being so, the greatest favour God can shew us in
this world, is, to furnish us with those means, and to
put us in the way that conveys us most surely to the
happy region of the blessed. Now God himself,
by the mouths of his prophets, declares, that afflic-
tions are the most proper means to draw people to
their duty. *In their affliction they will seek me ear-
ly,* Hosea v. 15. And for this reason God pro-
claim'd he would scourge his people into repen-
tance,

tance, seeing his favours had only served to inflame their rebellion; *I will put my fear in their hearts,* Jerem. xxxii. 40. I will punish their faults here, that I may not be forced to torment them hereafter, and teach them the rigour of my justice, by the severity of my mercy. And why? *That they may not depart from me;* from the eternal pleasures I have prepared for my friends, to plunge themselves into the everlasting flames I have kindled for my enemies.

Besides, they cut those bonds that tie us to earth, and impede our flight to heaven. The inordinate love of the world is the source and origin of all our misfortunes. This enchanting Syren runs away with our senses and reason too. We sacrifice to this imaginary deity (not our children) as the idolatrous Jews did to Moloch, but our ease, our bodies, and (what passes the height of frenzy and madness) our souls also. Now while our thoughts crawl upon earth, how can our desires soar up to heaven? Whilst we court God's mortal enemy, how can we pretend to his friendship? There is only one way to take off the charm; the fool's paradise, that cheats our eyes, and fascinates our hearts, must be broken: In a word, we must be convinced to demonstration and evidence, that this world is not the seat of happiness, and that the best we can expect here are gilded miseries, or glittering nothings.

But here is the difficulty; we dote on our chains, and are enamour'd with our slavery, and fear nothing more than to be set at liberty. Let God cry out never so loud, by the mouth of the *wisest of men*, That the world is nothing but pomp and shew, a piece of pageantry, and a scene of vanity and vexation of spirit? This declaration moves us not; nothing but experience will restore us to our wits.

Hence

Hence God in his mercy strikes us sometimes with sickness : then we begin to confess, that we may mourn in the midst of pleasure, hunger in plenty, and feel the greatest effects of poverty in abundance. A severe sickness takes down a high stomach, and clears the brain of those intoxicating vapours continual health has raised : then we begin to confess, all the goods of nature and fortune are insignificant without health. Then follows a suit of law : bribes over sway justice ; we are cast, and dispossess'd of our estate ; and tho' we fancied ourselves seated above the clouds, above the reach of vicissitude, and the stroke of misfortune, we find ourselves on the dunghill with Job, and perchance surrounded by a troop of less comforting comforters.

Then we confess this great truth, we refused to learn at a cheaper rate ; *Man born of a woman is great in nothing, but in his capacity of suffering.* All the charms of worldly magnificence disappear ; we raise up our eyes to heaven, and implore his succour, who alone is able to assist us. Like frightened children, we fly for safety to our heavenly Father's arms, who has taught us this lesson, *that affliction is our school-mistress.* Prosperity is too airy and giddy ; our brains are too weak to bear it ; *Therefore it was necessary that temptation should try us :* nothing but such a corrosive was able to restore us to our senses.

Turn over the scripture, and you will find the Jews (when they enjoyed plenty under the shade of their vines) rather drunk with pleasure, than mindful of their Benefactor. But when they felt their enemies sword, and groan'd under the chain of servitude, *they cryed to the Lord,* and found the effects of their prayers by a speedy deliverance. And for three hundred years idolatry waited on prosperity, and repentance on affliction ; so true it is, that *tribulation is our best instructor.* The raven re-
turned

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turned to the ark, when it found no footing ; and when the trees appeared above the waves, the very dove forsook it.

But for a further proof, I appeal to every man's conscience. Were you ever more persuaded, that life has nothing estimable but its shortness, than when you groaned under the pangs of a painful disease ? Did you ever see a more lively prospect of the world's treachery and vanity, than when disappointment balk'd your pretensions ? Did not your criminal amours expire together with your prosperity ? And was not repentance almost of the same date with adversity ? Yes, yes ! grief and joy seldom lodge in the same breast ; when our heart akes, we are not at leisure to procure diversion for the body.

Tell me not, that if afflictions draw some people to God, they fright as often others from him ; that they are attended by curses, as well as by thanksgivings ; and if they place some in heaven, they throw others into hell. What can be concluded from this, but that some people will damn themselves, in spite of God's fatherly endeavours to save them ? When a patient refuses the doctor's *Recipe*, if the distemper grows upon him, he must accuse (not the remedy) but his own folly. I pretend not, that all those are mark'd out for comfort in the next world, who groan in this. Too many step out of a temporal hell into an eternal one. But the fault is their own ; because by their clamours and impatience they defeat God's designs, and turn the saving potion, he prepares, into deadly poison.

Tho' indeed afflictions may be seasonable to sinners (say some) yet these are not the only sufferers ; we see oftentimes the hand of God fall heavy on those, who take no step but towards heaven, who never think of the world but to condemn it, nor of God, but to love him ; yet their innocence is no protection

protection against persecutions ; nay, whereas the sinner is only lash'd with whips, the faint is torn with scorpions. It is true ; but the most innocent may become guilty ; they may fly from God as far as hell is remote from heaven. Is it then a piece of cruelty in God, to endeavour to make them happy, by almost obliging them to remain innocent ? And can any man deny, that these means are proper to keep them to their duty, that are sufficient to recall even the obdurate sinner ? It is certainly an office no less kind, to prevent my falling, than to raise me upon my legs, when down.

But tho' without afflictions he had stood to his duty, at least he magnifies his merit, by bearing them with the courage and resignation of a Christian. So that the faint has no more reason to complain of hard usage than the sinner ; but rather to kiss God's hand when he strikes, as well as when he caresses him.

Let us therefore submit with an entire resignation to the orders of providence, and receive from his hand afflictions without murmur, and prosperity without pride. Both lead to heaven ; prosperity indeed is the smoother way, but adversity the more secure.

O adorable Providence ! I cast myself into thy arms, and abandon my concerns to thy conduct. Thou art too wise to misguide me, and too good to deceive me. And when I follow so powerful, so loving a Leader, what can I expect, but security here, and happiness hereafter ?

EPISTLE

EPISTLE to the Colossians, Chap. iii. Verse

12. *Put on therefore (as the elect of God, holy and beloved) bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering.*

13. *Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.*

14. *And above all these things, put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.*

15. *And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body, and be ye thankful.*

16. *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.*

17. *And whatsoever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God, and the Father by him.*

The MORAL REFLECTION.

SAINTE Paul puts the Colossians in mind of the grace received in baptism, and uses this spiritual resurrection, as a motive to animate them to a holy contempt of this world, and a love of the other: *If ye be risen with Christ, seek those things that are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God*, ver. 1. If you are raised from the death of sin to the life of grace, from the slavery of the devil to the liberty of the children of the most high; let your desires bear proportion to your state, and all your actions aim at the purchase of heaven, where Christ sits at the right hand of God, ready to assist your endeavours, and to crown your virtues.

Nor

Nor does he stop at an exhortation in general ; but lays before them a particular scheme of their duty and practice ; *Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering.* Put on the livery of Jesus Christ, and convince the world you profess the religion he revealed, by exercising all those virtues he recommended. In a word, level all your thoughts at heaven, and let all your actions aim at his honour ; *Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him,* ver. 17. I will not stop at the former words, because I have already spoke of some, and shall have often occasion to explain the other : at present I intend to spend some reflections on the latter, which contain a doctrine little known, and less regarded, by the greatest part of mankind.

Every man labours in his station, either to raise his fortune, or to preserve it ; to fly pain, or procure pleasure. Some drudge from the cradle to the coffin, to fence against poverty, and to stave off necessity : they work themselves down in the day, and sleep out their fatigues in the night. But because they spend their sweat and spirits in the pursuit of temporal things, without any relation to God, they carry off generally disappointment here, and will receive no recompence hereafter ; and so may cry out, as the apostles did upon another occasion, *We have toil'd all night, and have taken nothing.* We have wearied ourselves with toil and sollicitude ; yet have reaped no other fruit, but the sad remembrance, that with the same pains we might have gained heaven, and now we have sold our lives for a past pleasure, and a future repentance. It is certain God will never reward those actions we do not for his sake, that is, to honour and glorify his holy name. Now let us cast up the precious moments

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that compose our lives, and we shall see how unadvisedly we throw those jewels on the dunghill to swine, and spend on trifles the time that might have purchased a happy eternity. How much have we debauch'd away? How much have we slept away? How much have we play'd away? How much have we sauntered away, on things either silly or purely natural, that will never be put to our credit in the next world? And when all this is substracted from our lives, how many moments shall we find husbanded to advantage, *viz.* consecrated to virtue? I will therefore prescribe a short method, which (if practised) will lead us the nearest way to christian perfection, and teach us the secret (hitherto unknown) of changing dross into gold, the most ordinary and inconsiderable actions of our lives into supernatural virtues. This St. Paul glances at in these words; *Whatsoever you do in word or deed, do it in the name, that is, in honour of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

It is certain, that a great part of human actions are indifferent; which is to say, if they deserve no punishment on the one hand, they deserve no reward on the other. The intention, with which they are done, stamps on them either sin or virtue. If they are directed to an unlawful end, they are evil; if to the glory of God, good. The Theban Crates divested himself of all his wealth, no less than the apostles; and yet he was as far removed from the virtue of poverty, so much recommended by our blessed Saviour, as from the worship of the true God. A thousand poor wretches have no other estates, than the charity of the faithful; no other houses, than the open canopy of heaven; no softer beds, than the hardest stones, and oftentimes not a fig-leaf to cover their nakedness; and yet, tho' they suffer the extremity of poverty, they are ignorant of the virtue. The nakedness of their souls sur-
passes

passes that of their bodies, the flames of their passions those of their raging thirst. In a word, tho' they are brought up in the school of poverty and patience, they seldom learn the first alphabet, which is to turn necessity into virtue. Why was the apostles abandoning their possessions so pleasing to God, that he promis'd them heaven ; and the philosopher's forsaking his, unregarded ? Because they stripp'd themselves of all for Christ's sake, and he for the meer sake of learning.

To give an alms out of a natural compassion, is not bad ; but yet it deserves not one grain of glory ; but if it be directed to a higher end, to God's honour, scripture assures us, it blots out sins, it draws down his mercy and grace upon us : in fine, it intitles us to a reward in heaven. That we may not therefore lose the fruit of all our actions, and go out of the world as unprovided almost of good works, as we entered into it, St. Paul exhorts us to direct all our words, and works, to the honour of Jesus Christ, even the most ordinary. Whether you eat, or drink, labour, or divert yourself, let it be to God's glory.

This supernatural intention raises these mean actions above their ordinary level, enhances their value, and while we serve nature, we serve God at the same time ; we refresh our bodies, and feed our souls, and prepare them for a happy eternity. Nay, Providence has so ordered things, that every christian's perfection consists in the due performance of those actions his state requires ; and this runs through every station from the prince to the peasant. God commands not princes to retire from business, to give themselves up to meditation, to macerate their bodies with extraordinary fasts, or to give audience in hair and sackcloth. They may live up to the dignity of their station, and carry all the marks of majesty about them ; they may ride at the head of

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armies, and declare war, when justice requires it. In fine, they may be gallant princes, and pious Christians also, if they perform all the duties of royalty with a sincere intention to please God, and to quit the debt they owe their sovereign master, as well as that they owe to their subjects.

Soldiers so freely transgress all the precepts of Christianity, that one would think they received of God a patent of exemption, when they enter into the service of their prince. They pretend, virtue lies out of their road, and that vice alone has liberty to follow the camp: but their pretensions are injurious to God, and prejudicial to themselves. The state is not answerable for the extravagancies of the men, and tho' they often fall into sin, they as often find occasions of practising virtue, and had they the wit to improve them (as they suffer the torments of the martyrs here) so they might share in their glory hereafter. In spite of precaution, they are exposed to all the rigours of heat and cold, of hunger and thirst, and expose their lives, as often as they come within the reach of muskets or cannons, and commonly they die as miserably as they live, and leave the world as void of merit as of money. Whereas, did they but sanctify their sufferings by a christian patience, and hallow them by a holy intention to please God, they might lay up treasures of merit in the next world, equal to those of the most mortify'd confessors. Nor would this lessen their pay, or lower their courage; they would fight more like men, and die less like beasts.

This doctrine takes in the judge on the bench, the lawyer at the bar, the master in his family, and the clown at the plough. Let them but keep the commands God has imposed on all men, and discharge their employments with an unfeigned desire to please him, and they have attained the perfection he requires at their hands.

I know

I know it is hard for people in the world to stand so constantly on their guard, as to be able to renew their oblation, at the beginning of every action: yet a little practice, especially continued, would diminish the difficulty, and perchance render that easy which seems half impossible. Custom has a strange ascendant over men, and we often experience a great difficulty even to shake off those habits we at first contracted with pain and violence. At least so soon as you are dress'd in the morning, you may breathe from the bottom of your heart this short ejaculation: *Oh God! thou art my beginning and my end; I was created to serve thee in this world, and to enjoy thee in the other. All my actions therefore, all the motions of my soul, are a debt I owe thy greatness and goodness. To thy glory therefore I consecrate all the actions of my life, and particularly those of this present day, and I desire thee to accept this small mark of submission and homage, which I pay with an humble and contrite heart.*

Such an act is neither hard, nor tiresome; it takes not up time, nor withdraws from business or honest recreations; and it is probable, it influences all the indifferent actions of the day, and raises them to a supernatural end, and will receive a reward; unless by sinning you tacitly recall it. But to make sure in a matter of this concern, renew it as often as you can. Now this practice being so beneficial, and withal so easy; what can hinder a Christian from spending his time to advantage, and from making the most of his life, but a supine negligence, and an extreme folly? Here is no embargo put upon your liberty, no new burthen. Do but your ordinary actions well, not out of a frolick, or a mere impulse of nature, to please sense or to gratify an extravagant humour, but to please God, who will reward a *cup of cold water* given in his name.

GOSPEL of St. Matthew, Chap. xiii. Verse

24. *Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, the kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which owed good seed in his field :*

25. *But while men slept, his enemy came, and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.*

26. *But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also.*

27. *So the servants of the householde came, and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares?*

28. *He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?*

29. *But he said, Nay, lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.*

30. *Let both grow together until the harvest; and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.*

The MORAL REFLECTION.

IT was ordinary in Palestine and Syria, as St. Jerome notes, to deliver instructions under the cover of some allegory or parable. It is certain, nothing makes a deeper impression on the minds of men, or comes more lively, nay, or more welcome to their understanding, than those instructions or reproofs, that are conveyed to them by glances, innuendoes, and symbols. David was immediately not only brought to a fight, but even to a detestation of his adultery and murder, by a story at a distance, of a rich man that had many sheep himself, and yet forced away a poor man's only lamb, that he loved

loved as his own soul, 2 Kings. Downright admonition is generally ill taken; it looks rather like the blunt reproaches of an enemy, than the advice of a friend; at least, it seems but the good office of one, who frames a disadvantageous opinion of us; and merely such a conceit renders us incapable of following, and sometimes even of hearing good counsel; but when we wrap up admonitions in mystery and circumlocution, men are parabled (if I may say so) out of their faults, without being told of them; for the very story flashes the light of their own conscience in their faces, and forces them to turn the application upon themselves.

Our blessed Saviour himself not only recommended, but inculcated this way of instruction and reproof, both in his doctrine and example, as the means God had pitch'd upon for bringing the idolaters and infidels over to the christian faith.

You have read the parable he proposed in the passage we are considering, and the doctrine it contains is so clear, that it is strange the apostles should desire an explication. However, our blessed Lord condescended to their desire; he took off the veil, and expos'd the mysteries to the view of his auditory. He, who sows, is the Son of God; the field is this world; the good seed are the virtuous; the tares, the wicked; the enemy, who sowed them, is the devil; and the harvest is the end of the world, and last period of time. The angels are the reapers, whom the Son of man will send to remove all scandals; they will assemble all the sinners and cast them into a furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

This is the explication our Saviour was pleas'd to make, and he has left it to posterity for our instruction. Every passage furnishes a subject worthy of contemplation: We see Christ's endeavours to save man, the devil's to damn him, and above all, God's

incomprehensible patience with sinners, who transgress his laws without shame or scruple, who fly in the face of his goodness, and turn his justice into ridicule. The angels press him to exert his power, and avenge the insolence with fire and brimstone; *Wilt thou, that we go and gather them up?* They only expect his orders to execute the decree. And he said, No. I will raise their conscience, and all the terrors of the other world against them; I will sollicit them with the impulse of my grace; *Suffer both to grow until the harvest.* I will bear with their treasons, ten, twenty, forty years; and then, if, after all my patience, they will die in their wickedness, *I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them up in bundles, to burn them.* I will in this place stop at God's stupendous patience in regard to sinners. It is a moving subject, and capable to make strong impressions upon the hearts of those, who have not debauch'd themselves out of the belief of a Deity. *Because the Lord is long-suffering, let us therefore be moved to repentance,* said the incomparable Judith, chap. viii.

It is strange that God, who treated the revolted angels with such severity, should deal so mildly with sinful man; their punishment was as quick as their crime; their damnation trod on the heels of their rebellion; in fine, so soon as they were guilty, they were made for ever miserable: but when man took arms against his Creator, and returned ingratitude for the favours received; instead of inflicting punishment, God promised a Redeemer, and gave the delinquents above nine hundred years, to wash out with tears the stains of their rebellion.

Yet what is man, but a compound of weakness and ignorance? Fond of error, enemy to truth; his beginning is shameful, and his end disastrous.

Not.

Notwithstanding, the Lord of heaven and earth suffers daily outrages from this vile worm, from this proud nothing. He swells against heaven, declares war (with a more than gigantick fury) against the most High, invades his rights, disputes his prerogatives, and, in fine, with those impious Jews mentioned in the scriptures, dares shake off obedience with an *I will not obey*. God sees this insolence, and detests it; yet, instead of a thunderbolt to crush him, he pours down his grace to convert him; tho' he hates the crime, he pities the criminal; and, when he has a thousand provocations to cut him off in the very act of sin, the excess of his patience stifles all the resentments of his justice; he not only abstains from revenge, but takes him into his protection, and suffers him to enjoy all the common benefits of nature. One would think so great a patience were below so great a Majesty. Princes regard the bearing of affronts, which is a virtue in a private man, as a vice in themselves. If they carry in one hand the sceptre, as the mark of their supreme authority, they carry a naked sword in the other to defend it, and to punish those rebels that dare open their mouths to revile their persons, or lift up their hands to strike them. In fine, they affect to shew their greatness, by the severity of their revenge; and rather place their sovereignty in the power of punishing injuries, than of rewarding merit. It is certain, no prince can be more jealous of his honour than God of his; no prince can receive so flaming affronts, or punish them with greater ease, or more rigour; yet God suffers the world to swarm with sinners, who trample on his laws; to be peopled with blasphemers, who invade his honour, nay, and with atheists, who attack his being, and draw upon his very nature. Justice, nay and mercy itself, cry out for revenge; *Shall we go?*

No,

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No, says God, Let the wicked live as well as the just, and let the rebels share the common effects of my goodness with my obedient subjects. Is not this forbearance stupendous and astonishing ?

But if we add to man's baseness a register of all the favours he has received of God, we must confess, that as man's ingratitude is surprising on the one side, so God's patience is inconceivable on the other. God was not content to give us a being, but would copy in us the original of his own perfections. He endowed us with an understanding to know the favour and our Benefactor, and a will to love him : he raised us to an end above the exigency of nature, to serve him for some time, and to enjoy him for eternity. And when we had forfeited our liberty by an unnatural rebellion, he bought our freedom, not by weight of silver and gold, but with the blood of his only Son ; he has mark'd out our duty with his own hand, and supplies us with force to fulfil it ; he allures us with the large promises of unspeakable rewards, if we remain faithful ; he threatens us with as great torments, if we fall into disobedience.

Notwithstanding, men seem to vie with their Creator, and endeavour to push their ingratitude as far as he has carried his kindness. The mad atheist divests him of his divinity ; the idolater claps it on his creatures, and seats the vilest, and the most adorable Being, in the same throne ; the blasphemers attack his sanctity by their blasphemies ; the avaritious his justice by their rapines ; the luxurious his purity by their uncleanness. One would take him for the common enemy of mankind ; his government is censured, his majesty reviled, and, in one word, he is the only Sovereign exposed to the contempt of all his subjects.

Nay, they ground their malice on his very goodness, and sin with freedom, because he is ready to pardon.

pardon. Some think he is impotent, because he does not punish on the spot; others, that he hates not sin, because he caresses with tenderness the sinner: so that they turn all his perfection against himself, and take occasion from the mildness of his conduct, to offend him. Can ingratitude fly higher on one hand, and consequently provocation to revenge on the other? Yet our gracious *God wills not the death of the sinner*; he not only forbears to punish him, but sets a thousand engines to work, to recal him; he awakes his drowsy conscience, and lays before him the dreadful prospect of his crimes: he unlocks hell-gates, and gives him a view of those dark regions below: he shakes man's rebellious will with the sweet charms of his grace, and continues the attack ten, twenty, nay, and sometimes forty years. Who would believe so great a Being should love so vile, so ungrateful a creature, to such an excess? He can receive no damage, tho' we are damned; no addition of happiness, if we are saved: his felicity has no dependance on ours; it was infinite before we had a being, and would continue infinite, tho' all creatures returned to nothing. What then (my God!) dost thou see in base man, that deserves, I do not say thy love, but even a thought? nothing, but thy own favours he has abused, and thy image he has defaced. The saints, the angels, the very elements cry out for punishment; *Let God arise, and let his enemies be scattered.* Psalm lxvii. 1. Yet God, offended, despised, outraged, by a vile creature, without cause, nay after a thousand favours, interposes, and declares for the criminal.

What conclusion must we draw from our past vileness, and from God's superlative patience, but this? *Because the Lord is long-suffering, let us therefore be moved to repentance.* Because God has forebore so long, I will no more put his patience to the trial. If he be patient, I am sure he is just,
and

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and his very mercy is a severe justice to those, who abuse it. He suffers their debauches and impenitences, to punish them more severely, and to render his revenge as remarkable as their obstinacy. For, in fine, *Suffer both to grow till the harvest.* He will endure their insolence only till harvest, that is, either to the end of the world, and then he will plunge the rebels body and soul into hell, or till death, and then their souls will begin to feel those torments that will never end.

O my God! you have suspended the justice of your indignation so many years, and spared my crimes that every moment called for execution; and shall I not stop the torrent of my vices, and put an end to the tyrannical empire of my criminal passions? Thy patience has quite disarmed my malice. *Because God is long-suffering, therefore will I repent.*

EPISTLE, I Thessalonians, Chap. i. Verse

2. *We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers,*

3. *Remembring without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father:*

4. *Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.*

5. *For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.*

6. *And ye became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost:*

7. *So*

7. *So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia.*

8. *For from you sounded out the word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad, so that we need not to speak any thing.*

9. *For they themselves shew of us, what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God.*

10. *And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus which delivered us from the wrath to come.*

THE MORAL REFLECTION.

SAINTE Paul preached to the Thessalonians with such success, that many both of the Jews and Gentiles embraced the faith of Jesus Christ; several ladies of quality were of the number. The progress of our religion awaked the synagogue; and, because they could not withstand the apostle's reasons, nor deny the miracles he wrought, they had recourse to violence and calumny; they raised the rabble (Acts, chap. xvii.) and accused both Paul and his converts of a design against the government and the established religion; *These all do contrary to the decrees of Cæsar, saying, that there is another king, one Jesus*, ver. 7. And now many are taken up, and imprisoned for traitors; officers are sent to apprehend Paul; *But the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Beræa*, ver. 10. However, the courage of the faithful sunk not: they maintained their faith with an heroic constancy, and employed no other arms in their defence but patience.

The apostle sends them this letter from Athens, to confirm them in their religion, and to congratulate

tulate their past fervour; he bids them bear up against the malice of the Jews, and the fury of the Pagans, and proposes all the arguments a seraphick zeal and a paternal affection are able to suggest, and concludes with the greatness of the reward that awaits those, who fight manfully, and die piously in Jesus Christ.

This exhortation of the apostle is no less seasonable to all, who at any time suffer for the sake of religion, than it was of old to those of Thessalonica; and therefore I shall follow St. Paul's example, and conjure such to stick to their religion, in spite of temptation and persecution. *Let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evil-doer, or as a busy-body in other mens matters; yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God on this behalf.*
1. Pet. iv. 15, 16.

Never was there more talk of religion than in our days, yet in reality there was never less. Some are for none, others for all, and a great part look upon it as a thing indifferent, as a trick of state, rather the invention of men, than the institution of Jesus Christ, and promulged by his command, together with an universal obligation on all men to embrace it. Others suppose they discharge their duty, even when they profess the religion *a-la-mode*, if they inwardly believe That, which they are convinced to be the true one. This heresy is as ancient as Jehu: this politick prince doubted not of the truth of the Mosaic law, but he would court his idolatrous subjects; and so adored the calves of Dan and Bethel in publick, and the God of Israel in his heart. But this mixture of policy and religion was true impiety; and the Holy Ghost has declared to posterity, *That he trod in the steps of Jeroboam*, which is as dismal an epitaph as could be engraved on his tomb.

It

It is not sufficient for salvation to build a temple to the true God in your heart, and an altar to a false one on your tongue ; St. Paul assures us, *With the mouth confession is made unto salvation*, Rom. x. 10. That we must not only be of Christ's true religion within, but also without. Our Saviour will disown those before his Father and the whole court of heaven, who blush to own him before men ; and he commands this acknowledgment, not only when it may be done without risque either of honour or estate, but even when our lives are at stake ; *If any man come to me, and hate not his father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple*, Luke xiv. 26. He admits no trimming disciples, no neuters. If we declare not for him, we shall receive the punishment of those who cabal against him. The primitive Christians never questioned this truth, and therefore no motive of flesh and blood, of interest or profit, was able to stop their mouths, tho' tyrants commanded them not to speak. They saw themselves pronounced traitors, by the unjust decrees of the Roman senate, their reputation confiscated with their estates, and their bodies exposed to all the cruelties hell could invent and hangmen inflict : yet death, under all these frightful disguises, was not able to fright young lords and tender ladies from Christianity, nor into an hypocritical dissimulation : they knew they were no less obliged to profess Christ's religion, than to embrace it, and that they must model exterior acts of religion to the interior belief, under pain of passing for hypocrites. In fine, knowing their duty, they gloriously complied with it, and now enjoy the eternal reward of a short suffering.

The hardship of prisons, and the infamy of dying under the ax like criminals and traitors, were
not

not able to overthrow their constancy, nor to shake their fidelity to their Redeemer. The fear of hell, and hope of heaven, softened all the dismal consequences of the profession of Christianity; they concluded it was more advantageous to run the hazard of suffering for a short time in this world, than for an eternity in the next; to fling up all pretensions to the enjoyments of earth, than of heaven.

It is true, to lose the goods of fortune, is difficult for flesh and blood to submit to; but the danger of losing our souls, I suppose, is more sensible. An estate lost, may be retrieved; but a soul condemned, is past redemption. He, who flings up religion to preserve a lordship, overpurchases the security. Nay, I believe, were the issue put to the poll, we should find more apostates without house and home, than courageous Christians, who have ventured all to save their conscience. The former often spend those estates in debauchery, they will not hazard for their religion, and die in the poverty they so much apprehended.

Do not say, when the storm is over, I will return to the profession of Christianity. This is a mere trick of the devil to delude you; *God will not be laugh'd at.* And can man's malice invent a more picquant raillery, than to transgress his laws, out of an assurance of pardon? We must suppose him to be dotingly fond of us, and indulgent to a weakness.

They, who would approve themselves true Christians, must trample upon interest, and set aside all regard to honour, pleasure, or danger. God never fitted religion to the times; he has not established one for a calm, another for a storm; one to live, another to die in. He is one in essence, so is his religion; it reaches to all places; it takes in all men and all ages. We are sure of salvation
in

in it, if we live up to its principles ; but not out of it, tho' we practise the most severe morality : *He that believeth not, shall be damned, Mark xvi. 16.*

Oh my God ! I do not blush at the gospel ; I am not ashamed of thy religion. Let the ignorant rally my perseverance in it ; I will pardon their sin, and pity their blindness. As no temporal motives shall ever withdraw me from the profession of the true religion ; so no human respects shall scare me from the duties of it. If it be a glory to be a Christian, it cannot be dishonourable to be a strict one.

GOSPEL of St. Matthew, Chap. xiii. Verse

31. *Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard-seed, which a man took and sowed in his field.*

32. *Which indeed is the least of all seeds, but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree : so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.*

33. *Another parable spake he unto them, The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.*

34. *All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables, and without a parable spake he not unto them :*

35. *That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world.*

The MORAL REFLECTION.

THIS passage of St. Matthew's gospel contains two parables, the one of the mustard-seed, the other of the leaven. The commentators and fathers of the church generally teach, that our Saviour by the grain of mustard-seed, which is the least of seeds, yet increases to the height of a tree; would explain the greatness of faith, and the progress of the Christian religion. How small, nay how contemptible did it appear in the beginning? Christ, born of a poor mother, in an abandoned stable; admired indeed by some, but contemned by more, established it by twelve fishermen, as ignorant as they were poor: some embraced it, but of the populace only, and even these in private, nay and trembling too. What can appear less? yet this little grain in the space of some years spread it self over the habitable world. Nay, tho' it seem'd a scandal to some, and a folly to others, it subdued all, and Rome the invincible first butchered its professors, and then became Christian.

But however St. Chrysostom and St. Gregory of Nyssa gave these parables another turn. These fathers pretend, they must be understood of example, which produces the same effects with the mustard-seed, which becomes a tree, and the leaven which seasons the whole lump. Good example, in small things, is often the occasion of great virtues, and bad as often of scandalous vices. I will in this place caution the reader against lewd company; because their example, in all probability, will infect him. For vice is catching, and therefore it is no less dangerous for the soul to frequent sinners, than for the body to converse with those, who carry the plague about them.

A phi-

A philosopher being asked, what kind of man such a one was, returned this answer; *Tell me what company he keeps.* He meant, that those, who club together, steer generally by the same principles; that lewd company produces rakes, and sober conversation reforms even debauchees. The scripture is plain upon the point. *He that walketh with a wise man, shall be wise, but a companion of fools shall be destroyed,* Prov. xiii. 20.

Now the reason is, that as, in nature, every agent endeavours to turn its contrary into its own nature; so in morals, virtue and vice are in a continual combat; the one draws upon the other, and the fight seldom ends but by the destruction of one of them; and because corrupt nature always flies to the assistance of vice, it is ten to one against virtue.

Bad company works two ways, by actions on our eyes, and by discourse on our ears; and both ways on our heart; each separate is powerful, but, combined, almost irresistible. Seneca tells us, that the way to any art is long by precepts, but short by example; *Because men generally believe their eyes more than their ears.* Ideas drawn in by the eye make a quicker and deeper impression on the faculties of the soul, than those that enter at the ear. Aristotle derives the force of example from the very nature of man, prone to imitation. *It is natural to men and boys to imitate one another, and in this they differ from other creatures.*

Now if it be so natural for man to imitate what he sees another do, it will be much more so, when the pattern invites, and inclination leads him to copy the original. We have all a strong bent to pleasure; and can scarce counterpoise the natural bias to extravagancies with all the force of grace, even when we sit alone in solitude and retirement. If therefore nature alone weighs us down,

what a plunge shall we make when bad examples help to sink us !

God commanded the Jews to extirpate the whole race of the Canaanites, and he tells them the reason. *They will certainly change your hearts.* Their example will debauch you, and their company will lead you into idolatry ; but the Jews minded more their interest and their passion, than God's command ; they spared some for servants, and changed the sentence of death (God himself had pronounced) into the punishment of slavery : but what followed ? *They conversed with Gentiles, and went over to their religion.*

Now the reason why bad company works so strongly upon us, is, that a continual commerce with those who make sin their business, as well as their pleasure, inures us to sin, and takes off the ghastly vizard that frightened us. Its votaries appear no less genteel than those of virtue ; their discourse sparkles with wit ; mirth sits on their faces, and prosperity waits upon them. The heavens pour down as kind showers on their lands, as on those of their neighbours ; they enjoy the blessings of health and long life, and hope in the end to pass from an earthly paradise into an eternal one. These considerations make unthinking people suspect, that divines in their books have drawn the picture of vice more monstrous than the original ; that they overflourish the damages of a bad life, and the advantages of a pious one ; and, when nature enforces the argument with a certainty of a merry life here, and the hope of a happy one hereafter, we shall steer by the compass of our companions, espouse their principles, and imitate their follies.

Some pretend, that, by conversing with rakes, they may bring them back to their duty : it may be ; but what probability ? a prostitute may possibly be converted in the stews ; yet who but a
madman

madman will try the experiment? a drunkard may be reclaim'd in a tavern; however, I would not endeavour to drink him into sobriety. These places breathe infection, and bad company is no less pestilential; the danger of being perverted is ten times greater than the hopes of converting a lewd companion; and therefore, by the rule of well ordered charity, we must provide for our own security. Leave Sodom with Lot, if you intend to escape burning; so long as you stay, preservatives are weaker than the poison.

But if being in the company, where sins are often committed, be dangerous; it is still more, when you hear, as well as see, provocations to wickedness. Now this temptation is inseparable from loose company. You may read the heart on the tongue: this is but the index of that, and seldom moves but by its direction. For what lies on the heart of a sinner but lewdness? whosoever therefore takes up with rakes, must expect nothing but lectures of profaneness and impiety, but satires upon godliness, and flourishes upon sensuality.

You desire to withdraw to perform your devotions; the very name puts the whole club in a ferment. Some play the doctors; they tell you, piety works upon the constitution; it flies up to the head, and raises hypochondriacal vapours. Others are pleasant upon the subject: it is a pretty employment (cry they, with a smile) for women and children; men are above such petty toys; and then sum up their discourse in a peal of laughter, and supply the weakness of their reasons with railery. You will tell me, such jests are too childish to be dangerous, and that a man must be little affectioned to his duty, to desert it upon so slight a temptation.

They are childish, I confess: however, more Christians have been rallied out of piety, and reli-

gion also, than tormented out of it. For, in fine, raillery cuts deeper than menaces; and a man of honour had rather be flashed with a sword, than lashed with a jeering tongue. History assures us, Julian the apostate scoffed more Christians into idolatry, than Dioclesian rack'd into it. But if this contrivance wheedles you not into vice, they unriddle the whole mystery of Epicurism. The greater part (say they) of those actions, education and custom call sins, are mere chimeras of our own creating; they have nothing bad but the name; lubricity is a slip of nature, the effect of inclination; it offends no body, but those, who, like vipers, turn all into poison. Nature carries us to it with such an impetuosity, that we cannot bear up against the current, and then how can God punish poor mortals for those things that are unavoidable? Is not this doctrine a great relief against a troublesome conscience? what it's our interest should be no sin, is it not probable we shall judge innocent?

Now, tho' at first such libertine doctrine may not go down, in time it will work efficaciously; a frequent repetition will soon remove disgust, and when once we hear it with indifference, we shall soon believe it with pleasure; and when we are talk'd out of principles, we shall lay down all thoughts of morality; for whosoever has no principles of virtue, has no reason to practise it.

Men generally pretend, the profane discourses of bad companions breed aversion; that fine language only, and genteel flashes of wit, affect them; that they abhor the doctrine, tho' they admire the turn, and approve the expression. This is a slender excuse, a wretched *salvo*. Would you hug a witty man, tho' struck with the plague? would his flashy sentences persuade you to take his tokens? without doubt, no. Why then do you postpone wit
to

to the health of the body in one case, and not to that of your soul in the other? Is the plague a greater evil than sin, and less than apprehension of death? Let their wit be great; I am sure, the abuse of it is ten times greater. For the rule is here, the more rhetorick the more mischief; and the more wit the more danger. An ill cause is always the worse for being well pleaded. Blunt libertinism is fulsome and nauseous; it rather works upon the stomach than the brain, and makes a man's ears a burthen. But when it appears wrapped up in luscious expressions, set off with flowing periods, and an appearance of reason, it pleases and kills at the same time; it enters like oil, and darts poison to the heart. Be not therefore so fond of their wit as to forfeit your own; buy not fine language at the price of heaven.

When therefore young gentlemen enter into the world, let them chuse such company, as may increase their piety, rather than diminish it. Certainly sober men may be as well bred as rakes; for I never heard, that to be virtuous a man must turn clown. God has so cut out our duty, that we may live sociably with our neighbour. He has not bound us up to our disadvantage, nor made our duty our misfortune; we may live handsomely and merrily also, without stepping over the laws of our profession; we may exercise our wit, and keep up to our duty; for virtue and wit are not inconsistent. In fine, we may enjoy those innocent pleasures God permits; and, altho' they are unable to glut the appetite of beasts, they are sufficient to satisfy reasonable creatures. Let us remember we are Christians; and let us assure our selves, we shall forfeit this glorious title, if ever we herd with debauchees; and therefore we must not only fly their conversation, but detest their vices: *For they will surely turn away our hearts,*

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1 Kings, xi. 2. and infallibly withdraw us from God. We must shut our eyes against their actions, our ears against their words ; for what is unfit to be spoken is not fit to be heard.

I. EPISTLE to the Corinthians, Chap. xi. Verse

24. *Know ye not that they which run in a race, run all, but one receiveth the prize ? So run that ye may obtain.*

25. *And every man that striveth for the mastery, is temperate in all things : now, they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible.*

26. *I therefore so run, not as uncertainly : so fight I, not as one that beateth the air :*

27. *But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection : lest that by any means when I have preached to others, I my self should be a cast-away.*

The MORAL REFLECTION.

IT is strange that Christians, who believe virtue will be rewarded, and vice punished, should live as if they disbelieved both. However, because they cannot justify this unreasonable conduct, they endeavour at least to excuse it ; and screen their infidelities with the pretexts of difficulty. It seems the Corinthians made use of the same veil to cover their imperfections. But St. Paul confuted their plea by their practice. He draws his argument from their Isthmian games, where all Greece contended for the honour of victory. *Know ye not that they which run in the race, run all, but one receiveth the prize ?* Altho' one alone can

can be crowned, a hundred pretend to the honour ; the uncertainty of the event neither baulks their pretensions, nor checks their hopes ; and altho' all fear to lose the prize, each endeavours to carry it.

And therefore every one *is temperate in all things* ; the passion of glory subdues that of pleasure, and on this occasion forces the most ungovernable appetites to obedience. The pretender ties himself up to abstinence ; he is so far from overcharging nature with ragoos, that he refuses it almost necessities ; he leaves those meats that please, for those that fortify ; and disoblige his palate, to render his limbs supple and limber.

Nay, he dismisses lewdness, because it enervates the mind and emasculates the body, and bids farewell to sensual pleasures, not only unlawful, but even permitted. In fine, he sacrifices all delight of sense to the bare expectation of conquest, and overcomes himself, to triumph over his rivals.

Yet what is the prize, but a crown of pine-branches, accompanied with the vain applause of an insignificant rabble ? with the tumultuous huzza's of byass'd mortals, who often blame beyond measure, and praise without reason ? *They do it to obtain a corruptible crown.*

But you, O Corinthians, let me add O Christians, you are engaged in a more noble contention ; you run not for the vain recompence of a fading garland, or the empty panegyricks of brain-sick spectators, but for a glory above imagination, for a reward that puts an end to fear, a period to hope, and a term to desire ; that makes you both great and good, and happy also, without a possibility of ever being miserable. If therefore Pagans, on view of so mean a prize, can force nature to discipline and regularity ; if they can stop its most impetuous sallies, upon a feeble prospect of temporal interest ;
with

with what face can a Christian interpose the difficulty of his duty, as a sufficient discharge from the practice of it? A Christian, I say, who has grace for his assistant, and heaven for the prize of his victory? *They do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible.*

This is the apostle's discourse in short; and it evidently shews, that all those who overlook their obligation, upon so weak a pretence, are guilty of folly as well as of sin, and transgress the laws of reason, no less than those of their Maker. And indeed the weakness of this excuse appears, not only in the instance St. Paul brings, but in a hundred others. For, if we only glance upon the universal conduct of mankind, we shall find to our amazement, that they suffer more to violate God's commands, than he requires to obey them; and by a strange, but most true consequence, to plunge themselves into eternal misery, than to purchase a never-ending felicity.

What recluse, in the frightful forest of Thebais, ever underwent half those austerities for heaven, which soldiers suffer for a groat in hand, and perhaps hell in reversion? The state of galley-slaves may perchance be less honourable; but I am sure it is not more wretched. These poor creatures truckle to the imperious humour of every petty serjeant or corporal; and so fall below the level of the basest servitude, which is, to be a slave to slaves. They undergo the extremities of heat and cold, without fence against the one, or cover against the other: their stomachs are generally as empty as their purses; so that the whole year is to them a Lent, more severe than that of the Romish church. In fine, they are neither masters of their time, nor even of their lives; so that, in conclusion, they not only groan under the most sharp penances of the rigid confessors,

feffors, but also under the pangs of the martyrs, without any expectation of their reward.

When a man is seized by the passion of lucre and avarice, does not this unruly appetite hang him day and night on the rack? He charges through all the terrors of conscience and honour, to purchase this desired treasure; and pawns heaven for a little shining dirt. He bids adieu to friends, relations, and country, and embarks his hopes and life too on a weak bottom, exposed to as many dangers, as there are shelves and rocks under water, or winds above it. He fries with heat under the torrid zone, and congeals with cold under the frigid. In fine, he plays the knight-errant through the world, in quest of what (perchance) he will never find; sure of nothing but present danger and future dissatisfactions: for tho' he freights the ship, his heart will remain empty, and his desires will swell with his lading.

Does a man aspire to honours? Good God! how many cares; how many submissions; how many chagrins do his pretensions cost? He must sacrifice his time, quiet, pleasures, estate, and too too often his soul, even for a disappointment.

Will a lady please? She must rack her body, force her temper, and sling up her liberty; she must be a slave to those she intends to please, as well as to those she fears to displease; she must stifle her inclinations, and study more to humour the passions of others, than to obey God. Let the world lash us with scorpions, we never complain; but when God lightly touches us, we scream, and break out into all the postures of impatience. God asks almost nothing, and we refuse him all. The world demands all, and we refuse it nothing. Oh the folly, the stupidity of mankind!

God

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God taxes heaven not only at a low rate, but even gives it for nothing. For what proportion is there between an eternal enjoyment and a temporal self-denial? Of the whole day what does he exact as his right? An oblation of it to his honour, and part of it to acknowledge our dependance on his benefits. He resigns the rest to our necessities, to our affairs, nay, and to our recreations too: he permits us to enjoy those pleasures that are lawful, and only forbids us to turn beasts: He neither damps our industry, nor cramps our vigilance. We may improve those estates we have received, or build a fortune on our personal merits and industry, provided we step not over the bounds of justice and honesty. And whosoever complains of this restraint, must fancy cheating to be a very honourable employment, and a distinguishing quality.

But in fine, virtue is not impossible, and therefore we must not despair; it is difficult, and therefore we must pursue it with eagerness and resolution: For, in a word, we cannot change our destiny. God has joined immortality to our nature. There is no stepping back into our original nothing: we must always be, nay, and either swim in inexplicable pleasures, or sink in everlasting torments. Virtue raises us to the first state, vice plunges us into the second. Seeing therefore the exercise of piety is necessary to insure your happiness, fret not at the difficulty, but come to the practice. To believe a thing impossible, is an infallible way to make it so. A thousand feasible projects have miscarry'd by despondency, and been strangled by a cowardly imagination.

Seeing therefore, by God's appointment, we are placed in this world, as runners in the list to contend for a prize, *So run that ye may obtain it*: Exert your force, and implore his assistance; use diligence, and stop not in the career. Perseverance
alone

alone compleats the race, and carries off the prize together with the victory. Tho' we begin well, if we founder before the end; if childish amusements interrupt our course, or despair withdraws us from continuing it, we lose the fruit of our past labours, and forfeit all right to a future reward. Let us reach therefore the goal; it is in our power. God's grace will accompany our endeavours, and inspirit us with breath and vigour.

And that we may push forward not only with speed, but alacrity, we must imitate the apostle, who went on with a kind of assurance of victory. *I so run, not as uncertainly*; I so go on in the career of this mortal life, without stopping to take breath; and the firm hope, that I shall once reap the fruit of my labours, buoys up my courage, and sweetens all my afflictions: And certainly hope is a most vigorous agent; it furnishes us with light to advise, and with heat to execute. It cuts out work for our head and heart, and persuades a man to stretch his endeavours to the utmost; and thus it quickens our desire and swells our resolution, not only to confidence, but an assurance that surmounts all difficulties, and forces almost impossibilities to give way.

But then we must not hope to conquer without applying convenient means: such a confidence is not hope, but a foolish presumption; and therefore St. Paul tells us, *So fight I, not as one that beateth the air*. He spent not his time in airy resolutions and vain purposes, that vanish'd into smoke and vapour. *But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection*. He declared war against his passions, that mutiny against reason, to draw us into rebellion against God: He denied them even lawful satisfactions, to stop their longing after those that are unlawful: he abated their fury by abstinence, and watch'd and prayed them into submission and obedience. For this

this great man knew that neither the world nor the devil could prevail against him, but by a secret intelligence with the senses, that give passage to those fascinating objects, which fire the blood, and cast all the passions into a ferment. He therefore set a guard on his senses, to fence against dangerous suggestions, and kept his flesh low by labour, discipline, and austerities. For without this caution, he rather feared damnation than expected a reward. *Lest by any means when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away.*

He has left us this short draught of his life, not only as a bare instruction, but as a model to square ours by. I know indeed, few Christians in the world persuade themselves mortification concerns them; they fence against plain texts of scripture with the arguments of custom and practice: and because most people follow the current of nature, they conclude no body is obliged to strive against it. As if practice were the measure of obligation, and fact the standard of right. But it is certain, the doctrine of Jesus Christ obliges all men indispensably to mortify their flesh, to guard their senses, and to check the irregular sallies of their passions. The gospel, I am sure, is very positive and full upon this subject: Jesus Christ tells us, there is no admittance into heaven, but by self-denial and mortification; that we must walk in the *strait way*, *take up our cross*, *hate*, nay, and lose our souls in this world, to love and find both them and him in the other. This is strong and plain, nay, and it is a precept, not a bare counsel.

For are we not obliged, under pain of eternal damnation, to follow Christ, to be his disciples, that is, to be Christians? And can we be either, without a total separation, not only from the love of the world, but also from an effeminate indulgence of ourselves? Christ says, No. *Whoever will*

will be my disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross. Nay, and he threatens eternal damnation to those who leave the strait, to walk in the broad way; who care for their flesh, and live in peace with their passions. Unless therefore mortification be commanded, why are the negligent and transgressors tormented with eternal fire? Where there is no sin, there is no punishment; and all sin is the breach of a precept.

Secular persons would fain lie out of the reach of this command; and therefore they pretend, it only takes in the clergy. But the Evangelist confutes this pretension; *What I say unto you, I say unto all,* Mark xiii. 37. This doctrine not only concerns the apostles, but all Christians. The prince therefore on his throne can no more plead exemption from this obligation, than the hermit in the desert, nor the princess than the chamber-maid; neither state, condition, employment, age, nor sex, exempt more from the observance of this law, than from the obligation of following Christ. Self-denial therefore takes in those ladies, who are so far from practising this doctrine, that they even mortify themselves by a continual study to avoid mortification, and rack their brains to avoid constraint; who, unaccustomed to command their passions, obey servilely all their desires, and give themselves up to the slavish government of flesh and blood.

It takes in those debauchees, who give full line to all the follies of a pampered body, and of impetuous lust, fired with wine, and inflamed with high feeding. Nay, those who glitter with title and equipage; who, like the rich man in the gospel, shine in silk and silver, and feast away their days at full tables, are more obliged to mortification than others: for in fine, high fed bodies are more wanton than those that are kept low by labour, watching,
and

and abstinence; and by consequence their passions are more keen, more boisterous, and stronger winged: besides, they live continually in the face of temptation; every sense lets in poisoned ideas that boil up the blood, corrupt the heart, and heat the passions into a tumult; and when they are thus attack'd within, and storm'd from abroad, what can be expected but a defeat, unless they keep a strong hand over their slavish passions, by weakning their bodies, that give life, vigour, nay, and fury to those domestick rebels?

O my God! thou hast placed me in this world as in a field of battle; my life is a continual warfare. The price of the victory is heaven, and hell will be the punishment of my defeat. Thou hast put the conquest in my power; and the overthrow cannot be the effect of my enemies strength, but of my cowardise: they may persuade me to surrender, but cannot force me. Seeing therefore my gain will be so great on the one side, and my loss so exorbitant on the other; I purpose, with thy assistance, to war, till my last breath, upon mine and thy enemies, the world, the flesh, and the devil; I will withdraw all affection from the first, I will punish the second with abstinence and watching, and then with ease I shall discover the wiles of the other, and despise his malice.

GOSPEL of St. Matthew, Chap. xx. Verse

1. *For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an housholder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard.*

2. *And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard.*

3. *And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the market-place.*

4. *And*

4. *And said unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right, I will give you. And they went their way.*

5. *Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise.*

6. *And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, why stand ye here all the day idle ?*

7. *They say unto him, because no man hath hired us. He said unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive.*

8. *So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first.*

9. *And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny.*

10. *But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more, and they likewise received every man a penny.*

11. *And when they had received it, they murmured against the good man of the house ;*

12. *Saying, these last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day.*

13. *But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong : didst not thou agree with me for a penny ?*

14. *Take that thine is, and go thy way ; I will give unto this last, even as unto thee.*

15. *Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with my own ? is thine eye evil, because I am good ?*

16. *So the last shall be first, and the first last : for many be called, but few chosen.*

THE MORAL REFLECTION.

OUR Saviour proposes this parable, to teach us God's kindness to men; his goodness in rewarding their virtues, and man's folly in disobeying his call, and refusing his invitation. It is a *Postulatum* in religion, that we were made for heaven; nor is it less certain that we must labour to enter upon the possession of this blessed inheritance: *And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard.* He promises a reward, but he requires work; he leaves us the profit of our sweat, and reserves only to himself the glory. Yet it is certain all those people, who covered their idleness with want of employment, would not accept of the favourable Opportunity of bettering their fortune. They chose rather to saunter away the day in the market, than to work it away in the vineyard, altho' their very idleness was laborious and without advantage, and their labour sweetened by the expectation of a reward; *For many were called, but few chosen.* And to keep up the parallel, altho' God requires so little at our hands, and promises so much; tho' our toil is short, and our recompence will be eternal; we decline the offer, lay hold of some petty amusement, and leave a happy eternity to a venture.

Tho' God commands us to labour, he furnishes us with materials, and seems even to stretch his infinite wisdom, in procuring instruments not only convenient, but most proper to facilitate the performance of the task he has imposed upon us. He receives us into his service by baptism; he arms us against *the burthen, and heat of the day*, those difficulties that interpose between us and our duty, by his grace: and if we faint thro' weakness or cowardise; if we sink under the force of temptation,
and

and throw up our innocence for an unlawful satisfaction, his goodness has still an infallible remedy in reserve, repentance. This restores a sinner to God's favour, renews the covenant, and invests him again in his forfeited rights, and reinstates him in his lost privilege of being heir of heaven: besides, he awakens our indifference by a thousand menaces, and animates our hopes by as many promises: he sets sometimes before us the dismal prospect of fire and brimstone, of a worm that never dies, of a life that always dies, and of a death that ever lives; then he opens heaven-gates, and gives us a view of that seat of bliss, of that region of happiness, where we shall fear no misfortune, nor desire any greater felicity: he raises our conscience against us when we do ill, and fills us with an internal joy when we do well. In fine, he dashes all our brutish pleasures with wormwood, and the most mortifying virtues with honey.

And now to consider the general practice of the world, who would not be tempted to think that hell were an unknown region to Christians? And yet it is to be fear'd, too many, after death, become acquainted with it. Our blessed Saviour declares in express terms, that *many are called, but few chosen. That heaven gate is narrow, and few enter.* To omit many more no less plain, than terrible expressions, which clearly shew, that, altho' all Christians are call'd in a most particular manner to the inheritance of the kingdom of heaven, yet *few are chosen.* And the reason is, because most run on in the broad way that leads to perdition, and few take the path that carries to heaven. I know some extend these terrible truths, proclaimed by the mouth of the Son of God, not only to Christians, but to the whole race of mankind. Notwithstanding, he spake to the apostles, whom he had taken into a peculiar privacy. He spake to those, who, charmed

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by his divine sermons, and astonish'd at his miracles, in all probability believed in him; and these circumstances seem to imply, that few, even of those, that then did, or should for the future receive his doctrine, would be saved. In fine, he pronounced this sentence, *few are chosen*, immediately after he had, in the parable, ordered those, he found idling away their time, to labour in his vineyard, to wit, in his church; and by consequence it is highly probable, *many are called, but few chosen*, has relation to those he calls to his service by a more clear and explicate invitation than the blind Pagans of Africa or America.

But altho' this sad truth were delivered in scripture in terms less expressive, less emphatical, experience, practice, and example prove it beyond a possibility of doubting. For is it not clear, that the practice of the far greater part of Christians runs quite counter to their obligation? They seem to place their duty in the transgression of it; to embrace Christianity merely to abuse it; they neglect what it commands, and do what it forbids. So that we may read in mens actions those vices that are prohibited, but scarce one virtue that is commanded in the gospel. It is a common principle, notwithstanding, among Christians, that they must square their actions by the maxims of the gospel; they must model their lives by Christ's, which is to imitate his example, espouse his sentiments, love what he approved, and hate what he condemned. This is an article of our faith; as there is no salvation but *in his name*, so there is none but in the imitation of his example, and the observance of his commands. Now if we confront our practice with Christ's, our actions with his precepts; shall we find any resemblance? any proportion? I fear very little.

He

He was born in poverty, lived in misery, and died a death both cruel and ignominious: he returned favours for affronts, and retaliated his enemies intrigues against his reputation and life, with kindness. Is there one stroke, one dash in the whole conduct of the greatest part of Christians, that resembles this original? Are Christians in love with poverty, who are not content even with abundance? who charge through all the ties of nature, honesty, and conscience, for a petty lucre, and barter heaven for a trifle? Are they admirers of afflictions, who even torment themselves, to evade them, who run mad after pleasure, under every disguise, and court it in all dresses? Do they love their enemies, who to the last extent of their power conspire their destruction? and when they have ruined their estate by unjust law-suits, and their reputation by the venom of a slanderous tongue; in fine, when they have pleaded their neighbour's purse empty, and sunk his good name to the lowest contempt, with him still more unfortunate than their malice can make him? If then we shall not be saved, but by forming our lives upon the model of Christ's, we may truly conclude, that tho' all men are called, few are chosen.

Now, as our practice has no relation to our Saviour's, so it is diametrically opposite to his commands. Darkness comes nearer light, than our conduct to our duty. St. Paul tells the Galatians, chap. v. 19. *That the works of the flesh are manifest, which are, adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in times past, that they, who do such things, shall not inherit the kingdom of God.* Here is a black catalogue of crimes, that damn the criminals;

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nals ; and how few can plead *Not guilty* ? Those sins of uncleanness, that used to carry shame along with them as well as guilt, now appear without mask or vizard : and more people blush to be thought innocent of these enormities, than to confess themselves guilty. They ride in gilt coaches, sparkle in pomp and equipage ; and the soft name of a *Miss* seems to compound for the unlawfulness of the practice. And this wretched disorder takes in almost our whole species ; it reaches all countries, and rages under every elevation : so that were the transgression of no other divine law damnable, this alone would verify those words of our Saviour, *Few are chosen*.

Besides, it is an article of faith, that neither the envious, the detractors, the drunkards, *shall inherit the kingdom of heaven*. How few, in proportion to the number of Christians, stand clear of these vices ? In a word, if we state the number of the damned by that of the transgressors of God's laws, it may truly be said, *Few are chosen*. I do not say, all sinners miscarry. God forbid ! For if this were true, few indeed would be saved. Not one, perchance, of a million, are found so happy, as to carry their baptismal innocence from the font to the coffin. But however, it is a received maxim, *Qualis vita, finis ita, As we live, we die*. Those, who run through a course of sin, (and this is the case of thousands) who by custom turn lewdness into a habit, and almost into nature, go out of the world in this desperate condition, and die as impenitent as they lived. For the last scene of our lives is commonly but a copy of the rest : our lives, in fine, and our deaths, are generally of a piece.

Yet, O heavens ! tho' we stand on the brink of two eternities, the one of misery, the other of happiness ; tho' it be ten to one we shall fall into
that,

hat, and for ever lose this; how unconcerned do we stand? one would think we neither hoped to enjoy the one, nor feared to suffer the other. Had our blessed Saviour revealed as distinctly, that all, as that few, shall be saved, could men live with more carelessness, or in a greater security? In this case, I suppose men might ease themselves of anxious thoughts; they might lay hold of the present, live fast, enjoy a mahometical elizium here, and be secure of a Christian paradise hereafter. Is not this a genuine draught of our present conduct? Is not our time employed in the concerns of the present? Scarce a thought takes a prospect of eternity.

Some pretend, they are so taken up with the care of a family, that their thoughts have no leisure to range beyond their present concerns. But alas! dear Christians; is it not your present concern to make some provision for eternity? to secure that, which, with all your care, will not amount to an absolute certainty? What can you remember, if you forget an eternity? and if you believe a state of damnation, is it possible not to think of it, not to tremble?

Others very coldly tell us, they live like others; but this excuse is as unreasonable as their conduct. Who would think men should carry folly to such an excess, as to justify their practice by the very course of their miscarriage? You live like the greatest part of mankind; you square your life by their practice: they damn themselves, and you will leap down the precipice for company. The beaten road leads to perdition; and whosoever herds with the crowd, meets his ruin. Universality indeed is a good rule in matters of faith, but not of manners: if you follow the cry and the track of mankind, you must expect to be misled. It fares not in our journey to eternity as in other voy-

ages, where the high-way leads us to our desired home, and where, if perchance we are out, the inhabitants may set us right : the broadness and plainness of the way is a demonstration it is the wrong ; and when the vulgar persuade us to go on, we must conclude it is time to retire. Of a hundred, who enter into a pest-house, if you saw ninety return with the plague-sores upon them, would you take a walk in this infected hospital ? yet others did. Why therefore do you steer by example in one case, and not in the other ? Is the body more valuable than the soul ? a fleeting life than an eternal ? or is death a greater evil than damnation ?

Our Saviour says, *Few are saved*, and the reason is, because few live up to the rules of Christianity ; because they take the *broad way*, indulge their passions, and loose the reins to appetite ; and yet you sleep secure without concern, without fear, as if the road, that leads others to hell, would convey you to heaven, or, as if the number of the damn'd would lessen the misfortune of damnation ! Suffer not yourself to be borne away by the torrent : follow reason, not example ; live according to the gospel, not to custom ; and persuade yourself you must comply with those duties, which few perform, to enjoy those pleasures in heaven that few possess.

Good God ! to recover of a disease, I baulk appetite, check my inclinations, and dismiss my favourite satisfactions ; I disoblige my taste with bitter pills, and unpalatable potions. But is it a question to save my soul ; I stand unconcerned, I refuse to move a finger ; as if heaven were below my care, or damnation either unavoidable or impossible. And yet I believe that few, perchance not one of ten, arrive to bliss, and nine of ten are plunged into fire and brimstone, that burn without intermission, and without end. The very apprehension

apprehension of only drawing a tooth, or lopping off a member, chills my blood, and casts me into an agony; yet the danger of being for ever severed from God, and herded with devils, raises not one hair of my head, forces out not one sigh, nor scarce one *Lord have mercy on me*. Where is my wit? where is my prudence?

O my God, soften my hard heart with the fear of thy justice, and raise in my soul a firm resolution to break through all those impediments that stand between me and my duty. Wealth, grandeur, and pleasure, are *vanity of vanities*, empty names, vain titles, insignificant nothings; below regard, unworthy of any thought but of contempt. My business is to save my soul, and my care shall be to place it in as great security as the dangerous world will permit. It is better to be saved with the few, than to be damned eternally with the crowd.

II. EPISTLE to the Corinthians, Chap. xi. Verse

19. *For ye suffer fools gladly, seeing ye yourselves are wise.*

20. *For ye suffer if a man bring you into bondage, if a man devour you, if a man take of you, if a man exalt himself, if a man smite you on the face.*

21. *I speak as concerning reproach, as though we had been weak: howbeit, wherein soever any is bold, (I speak foolishly) I am bold also.*

22. *Are they Hebrews? so am I: are they Israelites? so am I: are they the seed of Abraham? so am I:*

23. *Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more: in labours more abundant, in stripes*

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stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft.

24. *Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one.*

25. *Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck : a night and a day I have been in the deep.*

26. *In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren ;*

27. *In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.*

28. *Besides those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.*

29. *Who is weak, and I am not weak ? who is offended, and I burn not ?*

30. *If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities.*

31. *The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is blessed for evermore, knoweth that I lie not.*

32. *In Damascus, the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me :*

33. *And through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands.*

THE MORAL REFLECTION.

HERE we read a panegyrick of St. Paul, and, what is strange, the apostle pens the elogium himself ; he who protested more than once, that he undervalued the esteem of men, that he neither courted their praise, nor feared their blame ; he, who almost in every page of his epistles,

epistles, cautions us against vanity, and preaches up humility, not only as an ornament, but as the indispensable duty of a Christian; launches out, not by surprise, but *ex professo, with design*, on the theme of his own virtues. He enlarges upon his apostolical labours, and lays before the Corinthians a list of all he suffered for their sakes, and for the propagation of the gospel; nay, he lays before them with force, energy, and an unusual eloquence, his extasies and raptures. He fears not to publish, that he was taken up to the third heaven, yea, into paradise itself, and that, by an immediate commerce with God, he received intelligence of such high mysteries, as it was neither convenient nor lawful to divulge.

This conduct seems to have more of vanity in it than piety, more of the proud pharisee than of the humble publican: in fine, of an hypocrite, than of a saint. Notwithstanding, it is certain, St. Paul was the most humble of men, as well as the most zealous: He had no other interest but the salvation of his neighbour, and the glory of his crucified Master; and, if in this particular his behaviour had something extraordinary, the occasion had more. He had raised out of the ruins of idolatry a flourishing church at Corinth; he had cultivated it by his labours, and watered it with his sweat. Piety increased, together with the number of the faithful; so that Christianity got ground, and Paganism daily lost it. But scarce had he left the city, to employ his zeal in other places, but *false apostles* step'd into his room; they obtruded on the people, forged errors for revealed truths, and loose principles for the refined morals of the gospel.

They vaunted their nobility, to awe the multitude; *They gloried after the flesh*; and appeared saints to draw respect. They magnified their learning

ing and merit beyond measure, as well as beyond truth, and treated St. Paul with contempt and outrage ; they gave a malicious turn to all his actions, and charged his zeal with pride, intrigue, and avarice. This imposture had all the effect those hereticks could wish, and more than they expected : the people run in a moment from one extreme to the other, and despised him no less than before they admired him : they, who received his words as oracles, now cast them among the fables : his doctrine, forsooth, was romance, his charity design, and his zeal a restless humour. The saint saw the new preachers credit rise as his own sunk ; that their repute gave them power to do mischief, and the contempt, he lay under, incapacitated him to oppose it. They ran away with the people's purses as well as with their affections, and tyrannized over their consciences, to dispose of their estates. Yet the Corinthians were so charmed with their teachers, that they doted on their persons, and bowed to their tyranny without murmur, and to their rapine with pleasure. *Ye suffer, if a man bring you into bondage, if a man devour you, if a man take of you.*

The apostle knew, that the vulgar judge of truth and falsehood by the reputation of their advocates ; that a preacher, either raised in his fame, or ridiculed in his function, is disabled from doing much execution either upon infidelity or libertinism. The audience must be prepared to receive, no less than the preacher to give instructions. We seldom are prejudiced against a man, without having prejudice against his reason also. Who has lost the esteem of his audience, has no power to persuade ; for who will follow the counsel of a person he contemns ?

St. Paul thus, by the malice of the new apostles, being made incapable of discharging his duty, and carrying

carrying on the great work of the conversion of the Gentiles, whose salvation was his province by God's special assignment, resolved to take away the two grand obstacles, *viz.* the high esteem the people had of his adversaries, and the contempt they had of him: he therefore painted them in their true colours, and exposed them as they were, not as passion and artifice represented them. Their life, says he, is imposture, their religion hangs only on the exterior, and their zeal is confined to bare discourse. *Such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ,* ver. 13. They in reality pull down when they pretend to build, and pluck up under pretence of planting; and no marvel: *For Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing, if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness,* ver. 14. They disguise the fiend under the appearance of an angel, the capacity of the wolf under the meekness of the lamb. In fine, their voice is Jacob's, but their hands are Esau's.

Thus did St. Paul treat these new directors, who insinuated themselves into the confidence of the people, and drove on their private interests under the specious pretence of advancing the gospel. He knew that zeal carried him not beyond the bounds of charity on this occasion, that it was no more sinful to arraign the coiners of false tenets in religion, than of false money in the state, and that, if traitors to their prince (tho' their reputation suffers) may be dragged to execution, rebels to God must not be exempted from punishment. To be scrupulous as to the discovery of impostors, out of an apprehension of impairing their reputation, is to encourage villainies, to improve the trade, and spread the infection. Indeed, passion must have no hand in the business, much less revenge: a bad
intention

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intention vitiates the best action ; a judge, who pronounces a just sentence upon a malefactor out of resentment or revenge, is no less criminal in the sight of God, than the murderer he condemns. Our intention must regard directly the glory of God, and the salvation of our neighbours ; and in this case too we must shade their infamy, as much as the publick good will permit ; for a good name is both tender and precious ; it is easily lost, but seldom recovered ; and therefore it must be handled gently, with caution and charity.

Having detected the sly artifices and juggles of these pretended apostles, St. Paul begins to raise his fallen credit ; he shews, that they can pretend to no real advantage above him ; that he possesses those privileges those hypocrites only boast of. But because he stood upon slippery ground, he begins the parallel with reserve, caution and reluctance. He desires the Corinthians to excuse him, if he speaks in his own commendation, and protests, that nothing but their good could prevail upon him to entertain them with so extraordinary a subject. He tells them, they will perchance suspect both his wit and piety ; but he assures them, on condition these grow wise by his instructions, he will never refuse to be reputed a fool or a madman. In fine, he discovers his virtues, and the extraordinary favours he had received of God, as malefactors confess their crimes on the rack, by force and violence.

It is certain, the apostle took no pride or pleasure in the rehearsal of his virtues : as he contemned the fury of tyrants, so he despised the esteem of men. Grace had placed him in a region above the temptation of vain-glory, and the foolish desire of applause : he was only proud of humiliations and persecutions, and gloried in nothing but the cross of Christ, which appeared a scandal to the Jews, and madness to the Gentiles. However, I
would

would not counsel the Christians of our days to retrieve their lost credit by the same method. A just defence is not indeed contrary to the laws of the gospel. We may vindicate our honour unjustly worried by a rival or an enemy, and assert our innocence from detraction or calumny. But I would stand merely upon the defensive, that is, rather disprove the accusation, than *subpæna* my virtues for evidences; for we are so fond of our selves, so prone to partiality in our own concerns, that it is very hard, if not morally impossible, to keep within the bounds of moderation, to remove all vain complaisance, and only to regard the glory of God and the profit of our neighbour. For as we have a strange bent to blame our neighbour's actions, so we are carried on with an equal passion to admire our own. We contemplate our perfections and failings through glasses that magnify beyond proportion, and so are unjust on both sides; to him out of envious malignity, to our selves out of a fond and partial tenderness. In a word, a man must be a second St. Paul, to hold forth on his own merits, without being guilty of hyperbole in his discourse, and pride in his heart. So that this boasting humour argues at once both folly and sin; it exposes us to the laughter of men and the anger of God.

But what do we pretend, when we let loose the reins to this arrogant and intemperate passion? Is it a great name? alas! this is not purchased by vaunting words, but by generous actions. A man, who sets a running a thousand little springs, to insinuate himself into the esteem of others, will certainly meet with contempt. No body deserves praise less than those who too servilely court it. Perchance indeed, he may find applause from some fawning parasites; but these people's panegyricks are mere lampoons, worse than the most keen satires

tires or bitterest detraction. Yet make the best of it, it amounts only to this, that some think me fool enough to be flattered, and then others will certainly judge me enough so to be laugh'd at.

But altho' I should be so fortunate as to persuade people to praise me, what pleasure can I take in their hosannah's, unless I am sure they are sincere? that their judgment goes along with their tongue? And how can I believe this, without taking pleasure in imposing on myself? How often have I magnified those people's qualities in words, I despised in my heart? and placed them at the top of their species before their faces, to laugh them to scorn behind their backs? As I deceived my neighbour, it is just to suppose he deceives me. The world is all mask, all disguise and artifice; the whole commerce of society turns upon ceremonious untruths. I deceive some, others impose on me; and he passes for the most accomplished man, that acts this part the most genteelly.

Yet tho' men should be sincere in their praises, whoever buys them at the price of boasting, overpurchases them: for what is the multitude but a crowd of people, blind, ignorant and inconstant, that generally pronounce upon false views, and vary upon the least prospect of interest? Disesteem cannot make me less deserving, nor esteem more: judgments alter not the nature of things; they leave them as they found them, either worthy of praise or blame. But what can I boast of? My wit or beauty? Who am I indebted to for these perfections? When I was not, I could not be my own carver. God's powerful hand drew me out of my primitive nothing; he framed me in my mother's womb, and enriched my poverty with all the prerogatives I possess. I had no right to breathe, much less to have wit, strength, or beauty. Why then shall I glory in the bounty of my
Maker,

Maker, and value my self merely upon his liberality? I have nothing, not even my self: as I came from God, so I return to him; nor is it in his power to exempt me from his dominion. All my natural perfections are, therefore, lent ornaments, borrowed advantages, that may be recalled; and I must return at pleasure. But if I consider how wretchedly I have misemployed these natural talents, I shall certainly rather wish they had been less, than boast their greatness. Have I not exposed my beauty to ensnare my neighbour, and displayed my charms to kindle a fire, that will burn me here and hereafter too, without repentance? Have I not prostituted my wit to burlesque my Creator, and oftentimes to censure his providence, and to deny his being? Such considerations ought rather to enliven my fear, than swell my vanity; and, I am persuaded, upon the death-bed, more Christians wish their natural perfections had been less than greater.

Do I boast of my virtues? This is a kind of sacrilege; for I invade God's right, and appropriate to my self the immediate effect of his goodness. What have I, that I did not receive? Besides, I ceased to be virtuous, the moment I became proud. Humility is the foundation of virtue: if this be removed, the whole fabrick of a Christian life falls to the ground; and whoever values himself upon his virtues, will certainly be taught humility, by falling into the most shameful vices. God takes pleasure in shewing those pharisaical saints (who pride themselves in their pretended piety) that they are unlike their Christian brethren, not in the regularity of their conduct, but in the enormity of their crimes; that all the good we do comes from him, and all the evil from our selves.

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Let us therefore seek God alone in all our virtuous actions ; if we have any temporal view, we do ill even in doing good. *Take heed*, says our Saviour, *you do not your good works, to draw the esteem and praise of men ; for if you sollicite this petty recompence, you must expect no other from God.* It is an extreme folly to labour without profit, to turn the subject of an eternal recompence into an occasion of torments, to practise the most severe morals of the saints, and to carry off the punishments of sinners.

GOSPEL of St. Luke, Chap. viii. Verse

5. *A sower went out to sow his seed : and as he sowed, some fell by the way-side, and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it.*

6. *And some fell upon a rock, and assoon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture.*

7. *And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up with it, and choaked it.*

8. *And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundred-fold. And when he had said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.*

9. *And his disciples asked him, saying, What might this parable be ?*

10. *And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to others in parables ; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand.*

11. *Now the parable is this : The seed is the word of God.*

12. *Those by the way-side, are they that hear : then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out*

out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.

13. *They on the rock, are they, which when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away.*

14. *And that which fell among thorns, are they, which when they have heard, go forth, and are choaked with cares, and riches, and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.*

15. *But that on the good ground, are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.*

THE MORAL REFLECTION.

THE great truths, this parable teaches all Christians, ought at the same time to fill us with joy, and to cover us with confusion; to raise our hopes, and to alarm our fears. What can be more comforting, than to be assured from the mouth of God himself, that he desires sincerely our salvation, that he provides us necessaries for this end, that his infinite wisdom seems to contrive the most proper means, and his goodness to offer them. This he expresses under the parable of a husbandman; *A sower went out to sow his seed.*

But, if we read on, the end of the parable will furnish us matter of confusion and horror. Our malice contends with our Maker's goodness, defeats his holy designs, and renders his care and sollicitude ineffectual. For three parts of this holy seed is lost by our negligence, folly and malice, and so brings forth this fruit only, that it convinces the most obdurate, that God has a mind to save us, and we are resolved to be miserable. To prove this, I will only descant upon the explication our

Saviour was pleased to give of the parable, and the evangelist has transmitted to posterity.

The husbandman is God, *and the seed his word*, by which he instructs, counsels, and commands. He has spoke to men by as many mouths as there are creatures that proclaim his greatness and preach his glory. He has spoke to us by his prophets, who declared his will, who promulg'd his commands, and confirm'd their preachings with a thousand prodigies. And, in fine, at last he sent us his Son, not only as a Saviour, but as a Teacher also ; to point out the shortest way to heaven by his precepts. He preached three years in Judea, and accompanied his sermons with wonders ; and, when he ascended to his Father, he commanded his apostles to declare his word to all nations, that they might know their duty ; and he assured them of his grace, that they might be enabled to comply with it. Their successors, by his appointment, are invested with the same power ; they are his ambassadors, and speak to us in his name. *He that heareth you, heareth me*, Luke x. 16. and yet, tho' they endeavour to cultivate our souls, tho' they sow that word of God in our hearts, that anciently sprung up into martyrs and confessors ; Christendom remains as uncultivated as the wilds of America. It is over-run with Pagan vices. Our hearts, like some ungrateful soils, tho' sow'd with the best seed, produce the worst fruit. We need not go far for the reasons of this sterility ; our blessed Saviour has discovered three.

The first is mark'd in these words : *A sower went out, to sow his seed, and as he sowed, some fell by the way-side, and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it.* These are a race of men, who come to a sermon, yet are not present ; they see the preacher, but hear him not ; a thousand, either idle or criminal, imaginations with-
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draw their attention ; tho' their bodies are in the church, their thoughts are upon the ramble, in the play-house, the tavern, or places of prostitution. This was just the conduct of the Jews, of whom God complains, in the prophet Ezekiel, chap. xxxiii. 30. *Son of man, the children of thy people are still talking of thee, by the walls, and in the doors of the houses, and speak one to another, every one to his brother, saying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from the Lord.* They invite one another to hear your discourse. They throng into the assembly, yet no body is present. They seem indeed to enter into the audience ; but in reality they are absent ; their attention wanders abroad, their hearts keep at home. And this is the reason, they hear what you say, but do not what they are commanded ; they are neither moved with God's menaces, nor his promises ; those raise no symptoms of fear, nor these of hope ; the one cannot persuade them to leave vice, nor the other to practise virtue : the most terrible and most inviting truths make no more impression on them, than a ballad. For, in fine, their hearts are pre-engaged in an opposite interest ; avarice and ambition run away with their affections ; full of the creature, they relish no truth that condemns the choice, they have no mind, no inclination to alter. *Their heart goeth after their covetousness,* Ezek. xxxiii. 31.

The men, I speak of, hear the word of God, just as these rebellious Jews did in the days of the prophet ; and what wonder, the precious seed falls to the ground, and, instead of producing fruit, becomes a prey to *the birds of the air* ? They are people always busy, yet restlessly idle : For tho' they are in a perpetual motion, they neglect the only affair of concern, their salvation ; they come attended to the church with all the retinue of

their passions ; whilst the preacher speaks of heaven, their thoughts hover upon earth ; their imagination wanders in a wilderness of representations, either foolish or criminal. The word of God is *trodden down* ; perchance indeed they hear it ; but it only strikes upon the ear, and vanishes into noise and sound ; the heart is taken up already ; heavenly truths are unpalatable ; the devil drowns them with a thousand fancies, both idle and ridiculous ; lest, weighing them with coolness and consideration, they should believe them, and faith should lead to the practice : *Then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe, and be saved.*

The second part *fell upon a rock, and, as soon as it was sprung up, is withered away, because it lacked moisture.* Here our Saviour (says St. Gregory) represents those, who hear his word with petrified hearts : they have not only flung up their innocence, but also all thoughts of repentance. Their conscience is steeled, and their principles are as corrupt as their manners. As drops of water make small cavities in a stone, but cannot pierce it ; so the word of God, either frequently heard or read, makes a superficial impression on their souls, but takes no root. If you discourse upon the severity of God's justice ; upon the tortures a criminal conscience suffers here, and the eternal pains it will feel hereafter ; they at first receive you, as the Athenians did St. Paul, with laughter ; and if, after redoubled attacks, you shake their obstinacy, you must not expect to force it. You may fright them ; you may strike out of their flinty hearts a sigh, a feeble desire, or rather fruitless resolution of amendment ; but all the heavenly seed falls on a rock without humidity, without moisture, and so evaporates into blades,

blades, or perchance into blossoms; but never comes to maturity.

Our Saviour also teaches by this part of the parable, that there is a false repentance as well as a true one, and imperfect conceptions in grace, as well as in nature. I know the penitent cannot certainly distinguish the one from the other. However, circumstances may give great lights, and move him to frame a prudent judgment for the one side or the other.

For example; an habitual sinner, frightened by a sermon, or made uneasy by a spiritual lecture, begins to think of repentance: he confesses his sins with all the anguish of a real penitent; but does he restore what he has unjustly invaded? does he break off a criminal commerce, dismiss the companion of his crimes, and the cause of his misfortune? He will not submit to the one, and cannot (as he pretends) wean himself from the other. This is the embryo of repentance, the beginning of sorrow; like that of Saul and Antiochus. The grace of God began to work, but it fell upon a rock without mould, without moisture enough to bring it to perfection; for, in a word, who can detest the sin and doat on the cause of it? who can resolve to avoid the offence, and yet fling himself into the occasion?

Others promise amendment of life; they will rather look death in the face than a sin; rather forgo their most darling satisfactions, than fall into God's displeasure; but however, they immediately replunge into their former disorders, and rise from their knees to their pleasures. One day drowned in tears, the next they swim in criminal delights; now they will save their souls, on the morrow they endeavour as hastily to damn them. Is the repentance of these men sincere? genuine? fruitful? I grant, man's will is not unchangeable:

the most strong, the most steady purpose may be broken either by surprize, weakness, or the violence of an extraordinary temptation. The most strict virtue may stumble ; but choice and frequency conclude strongly for inclination. It is certain also, that a subsequent fall does not influence the precedent sorrow ; tho' I sin to-day, I might have yesterday been sincerely penitent ; for, in fine, immutability is neither the prerogative of a repentant, nor of an innocent soul ; but for a man to run through a long course of repentance, and as long of sin ; to be this moment all sorrow, the next all mirth ; one day mortification, another all pleasure ; to be almost the same moment saint and sinner, a Magdalen and a Thais ; is morally impossible.

These people, I know, charge their inconstancy upon the weakness of nature. No doubt, man is weak and inconstant almost to a prodigy ; but it is strange, that, in the point of salvation only, we should play at fast and loose in this deplorable manner. Do men, for whole years together, build one day and pull down another ? hate a thousand times the same object to excess, and as often love it to folly ? These changes are indeed possible, but scarce practicable. Notwithstanding, we must believe they are not only possible, but continually practised, before we can persuade our selves the repentance of those Christians is hearty and sincere. The hearts of those men are stony ; a little earth covers the surface ; God's grace finds indeed moisture enough to flower, but not to ripen. Being sprung up, it withered, because it lacked moisture.

Nor does this part of the parable concern manners only, but faith also. This our Saviour tells us in the explication, *They on the rock, are they,*

they, which when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away. These are men, who seem solicitous for their salvation, convinced that he, who has not the Church of Christ for his mother, will never have God for his Father: they seek instruction with eagerness; they submit to reason, and embrace the true religion with joy and transport. But does a storm arise? they relapse into their former errors; they will follow Christ to Tabor, but not to Calvary; *These have no root.* The great truths of Christianity lie on the surface of their hearts, but pierce no deeper; they misapprehend religion; they suppose that violence or force justifies apostacy, and so in *time of temptation fall away.*

Another part of the seed fell among thorns, *and the thorns sprang up with it, and choaked it.* The people, represented in this place, receive the word of God with cheerfulness; it finds both earth and moisture; neither the devil picks up the seed, nor temptation burns it. But tares grow up with the corn; disorderly affection to temporal goods, to wealth and pleasure, stifles it before it comes to maturity. And thus men fall into God's displeasure, not by the sword of a persecuting tyrant, but by the craving appetite of temporal interest, by the glittering charms of gold and silver, and the soft allurements of pleasure. Whosoever is overconcerned for the things of this world, will not spend his thoughts on those of the other. Our hearts and treasure lie together; so that if this be lodged on earth, that flies not an inch higher. And the worst is, whosoever is oversond of riches seldom distinguishes upon the means. He stands neither upon honour nor conscience, and contemns the niceties of morality; sometimes indeed, re-
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morfe interposes ; but however, he goes on ; the vehemence of his passion drowns the clamours of conscience. Nay, he scarce believes any thing unlawful that makes against him. Thus a great love of the world hurries us into a rebellion against God ; and many, who would have given up their lives in defence of their faith, damn their souls, to purchase an estate. They had christian sentiments, and were in a fair way to practise them ; but *they were choak'd with cares, and riches, and pleasures of this life.*

In fine, *some fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundred-fold.* These are declared thrice happy by the mouth of our blessed Saviour, *Blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it,* Luke xi. 28. And indeed, tho' perfect and compleat felicity only dwells in heaven ; yet it is certain, the servants of God, even in this world, carry a kind of paradise about them. For our great Maker binds us even to our advantages, and makes our duty our happiness. A good man may suffer, but cannot be miserable : he may be forc'd out of his dwelling by circumvention, or violence ; yet is not unfortunate. For whosoever has lodged all his concerns in the hands of God, and submits to the orders of his providence, receives good and evil with the same evenness of temper ; that with thankfulness, this without murmur : he neither swells at the approach of prosperity, nor desponds at the sight of adversity. In fine, he desires to be what it shall please God to make him ; and so is neither deluded with flattering hopes, nor rack'd with tormenting fears. I grant, the best of men arrive not to this happy state in a moment ; *they bring forth fruit with patience.* Virtue, like natural productions, requires time ; and receives its perfection from labour, practice, and assiduity. *When we begin to do well, says St. Gregory, we are only as it were*

were a blade of corn; but when we bring our good works to perfection, the ear*.

Oh my God! remove my heart of stone, which has hitherto been as it were proof against the force of thy grace, and place in me one of flesh, susceptible of the least impresson of thy divine spirit: so often sown with the seed of thy holy word, so often watered with thy inspirations, it has brought forth nothing but weeds, or thorns; ingratitude without end, and sins without number. Cease not to cultivate my barren soul; let not my wickedness tire thy goodness, nor my rebellion thy mercy. I will embrace thy commands with chearfulness, and execute them with resolution.

I. EPISTLE to the Corinthians, Chap. xiii. Verse

1. *Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity; I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.*

2. *And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge; and tho' I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have no charity, I am nothing.*

3. *And tho' I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and tho' I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.*

4. *Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity wanteth not it self, is not puffed up:*

5. *Doth not behave it self unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil:*

6. *Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth:*

* Cum operari recta incipimus, herba sumus; cum autem ad profectum boni operis crescimus, ad spicam pervenimus. Greg. in Ezech. Hom. 13.

7. *Beareth*

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7. *Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.*

8. *Charity never faileth; but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.*

9. *For we know in part, and we prophecy in part.*

10. *But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.*

11. *When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.*

12. *For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.*

13. *And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.*

THE MORAL REFLECTION.

THE Corinthians were so fond of the gift of tongues, that they could not bear the privation of this miraculous influence with patience. St. Paul counsels them to be thankful for the gift; but not to place the perfection of a Christian in the possession of it. For it is a pure grace, a matter of favour, that renders us not better, but may worse, if we receive it not with humility, and employ not the talent with caution and prudence. *Covet earnestly the best gifts,* says the apostle, chap. xii. 31. Attempt the purchase of those gifts that are most noble, most beneficial to yourselves, and most useful to your neighbour; that make you both great and good. *And yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.* There is still a better way to christian perfection. And immediately he explains his meaning: *Tho' I speak with the tongues of men and*

and of angels, and have not charity; I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. Bend all the powers of the soul, all your endeavours, to the acquiring of charity, to wit, a perfect love of G^d. This alone entitles you to happiness; all other gifts are insufficient. For tho' you speak all the languages in the world; tho' you enter into the future, and discover without mask all the hidden mysteries of the old and new law; tho' you are able by the strength of your faith to move mountains: yet if you want charity, you are of no value, no esteem, in the sight of God; *I am nothing*. But on the other side, tho' tyrants clap you on the rack, and inflict as many torments as rage can invent and flesh suffer; tho' diseases prey on your body, and calumny on your reputation: tho' you fall as low as malice can push you, or envy wish; yet if you love God above all things, you are happy in the midst of all these painful trials, which deluded mortals call misfortunes. He either lays asleep the sense of feeling, that you may perceive no pain, or arms you with courage to support it. Were it possible for a soul to undergo the pains of the damn'd and love God, it ought not to be termed miserable, nor happy even in heaven without it. For, in fine, we cannot love God without receiving a return of love from him; and can we fear under the safe-guard of the Omnipotent? What can we hope, when we possess him, who possesses all that is desirable, all that is amiable; who invests our soul with his sanctifying grace here, and will beatify it with the perfect enjoyment of himself hereafter?

These are the advantages of that charity St. Paul so zealously recommended to the practice of the Corinthians: And now, who would not imagine our Maker were the sole object of all our affection? That, disengaged from the faint charms of all created beings, we lodged our heart in God, the beginning,
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the end, the center of all perfection? Notwithstanding, (be astonish'd, Oh ye heavens!) altho' he not only permits, but even commands us to love him; altho' his infinite perfections alone deserve our love, and our interest persuades us to give it him; yet we throw away our hearts upon creatures, not only unable to enrich us, but even to keep off want and indigence. And at the same time, we deny God, not only love, but even respect; we transgress his commands, as if, like the Pagan deities, he had no eyes to see our insolence, no hands to revenge it; as if we expected no reward from his friendship, nor punishment from his hatred. Yet at the same time, we believe he is the best of friends and worst of enemies; that he will crown our virtues with eternal glory, and punish our crimes in flames of sulphur. We believe, he has made himself (if I may so say) miserable, to make us happy: that, of a king of glory, he became a man of griefs, to purchase for us pleasures, with as many wounds, as he had members in his body, and powers in his soul; nay, and with as many crosses, as we had sins. Where is our faith? Where is Christianity? Where is the least spark of reason in this monstrous conduct?

A fading beauty, that lies on the surface of deformity and corruption, enflames our heart, by love, to frenzy and madness; a trivial benefit reconciles us to a mortal enemy. Yet God is the center of all perfections; he is all beauty, all wisdom, all goodness, all bounty, all mercy; and we love him not; his perfections have no charms for us, his kindness no attractives.

Let us then act like men, and return our hearts to him, who made them; if we place them lower, they suffer violence: God alone is their center and the point of their repose.

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That we may know when we possess this excellent virtue, St. Paul has drawn the character at length of a Christian that practises it.

First, *He suffereth long.* Neither pain nor misfortune cast him into impatience, nor force him to murmur. He receives health and sickness with the same equality of temper, and is not concerned at the loss of an estate, nor at the purchasing one. Neither bad fortune sinks him into grief, nor good swells him with joy. He pronounces no less cheerfully, *the Lord hath taken away*, than *the Lord gave*; and blesses his paternal hand, when he wounds, no less than when he heals.

Secondly, *He is kind.* Injuries rather raise his compassion than anger; and, when he cannot excuse an enemy, he pardons him. He is the refuge of the miserable; he never lets any one pass without either relief or comfort. When he is unable to assist them, he wishes he were in a capacity. And when their evil is too strong for a remedy, he applies compassion and instruction.

Thirdly, *He envieth not.* Content with his own estate, he casts no envious glance on the prosperity of his neighbour; he desires not to rise higher by his fall, nor wishes any one less, to become greater.

Fourthly, *He vaunteth not himself, is not puffed up.* He is not self-conceited, he neither undervalues his neighbour's advantages, nor over-rates his own. Penetrated with a sense of his own nothingness, he proclaims God the author of his virtues, and himself of his vices. He is so far from priding himself in the favours he receives, that they render him more humble and circumspect. And as he is thankful for the benefit, so he is careful to employ it to advantage. Ambition never blinds him; he affects goodness, not greatness, and places his honour in the contempt of title and dignity. It is more glorious to despise, for God's sake, an high employment,

employment, than to possess one; to throw himself under the feet of men, than to stand above them. For honourable posts are seldom purchas'd without great crimes, nor maintain'd without great injustice.

Fifthly, *He doth not behave himself unseemly.* He knows not malice, but to detest it; he is neither governed by heat, nor passion, and hates precipitation in laying designs, and hurry in executing them. For where passion presides, reason is voted down by noise and numbers. Interest takes place of justice, pleasure of duty, and repentance treads on the heels of both; but not amendment. It is easy to slide into an error, but hard to forsake it. Whosoever resolves without mature deliberation, seldom comes off with success; because the means bear no proportion with the end, or unforeseen accidents disappoint them.

Sixthly, *He seeketh not his own.* The interest of his neighbour touches him more sensibly than his own, and he rather suffers an injustice, than commits one. He lets fall a suit, when he cannot carry it on without the breach of charity, and so exchanges a temporal advantage for a virtue.

Seventhly, *He is not easily provoked.* He is proof against the temptations of rage and anger, and will not turn beast or fool upon every slight provocation. Other passions weaken indeed reason, but this destroys it. And the wisest men become fools, the moment they bow to the violence of this hair-brain passion.

Eighthly, *He rejoiceth not in iniquity.* If his neighbour falls into a fault, he pities his misfortune, and warns him of his duty with sweetness. He applies soft remedies to mollify his heart, and not corrosives to harden it. He exhorts him; prays for him; but never thinks of insults or reproach. He
wonders

wonders at no body's sins, but his own : and knows that those, who stand, are made of the same clay with those who fall ; and that they will give proofs of their weakness, unless God's helping hand assist them : That the readiest way to oblige him to withdraw his mercy from us, is to refuse our charity to others. He reflects, that his damnation is not pronounced, who sins ; nor his salvation, who practises the most refined virtues. The fall of the one may discover the precipice into which he falls, and persuade him to avoid all future occasions ; and the virtues of the other may make way for pride, which contemns the most provoking temptations, and is often subdued by the least. He therefore dares not condemn the greatest sinner, for he may repent ; nor canonize the greatest saint, for he may fall ; but leaves all to God's tribunal, who rewards and punishes as every one deserves. Indeed, he sits upon himself, and passes sentence upon the least imperfections, because it is his duty. He sifts his thoughts, examines his inclinations, suspects his good actions, deplores his bad, and expects a general pardon from God's goodness, when he pardons himself in nothing.

In a word, *Charity never faileth*. It waits upon us into the other life. Faith and hope die with us ; for in heaven we shall see all those mysteries we believed ; and enjoy that happiness we hoped for. But charity (*i. e.* the love of God) will live eternally. And as it began our felicity on earth, so it will compleat it in heaven.

Receive, O my God, my understanding, my will, and all I possess. The favours I have received from thy goodness call for a return of love and gratitude : thy perfections and my dependance command it. Nothing deserves my heart, but thou, O my God, who madest it ; nothing can satiate it, but thou who createdst it. Thou commandedst me,
 O Lord,

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O Lord, to love thee ; give me what thou commandedst, and command what thou pleasest.

GOSPEL of St. Luke, Chap. xviii. Verse

31. *Then he took unto him the twelve, and said unto them : Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished.*

32. *For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spit-
ted on.*

33. *And they shall scourge him, and put him to death, and the third day he shall rise again.*

34. *And they understood none of these things : and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken.*

35. *And it came to pass, that as he was come nigh unto Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the way-side begging.*

36. *And hearing the multitude pass by, he asked what it meant.*

37. *And they told him, that Jesus of Nazareth passed by.*

38. *And he cried, saying, Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me.*

39. *And they which went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace : but he cried so much the more, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me.*

40. *And Jesus stood and commanded him to be brought unto him : and when he was come near, he asked him,*

41. *Saying, What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee ? And he said, Lord, that I may receive my sight.*

42. *And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight : thy faith hath saved thee.*

43. *And*

43. *And immediately he received his sight: and followed him, glorifying God: and all the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God.*

THE MORAL REFLECTION.

OUR blessed Saviour had preach'd to the Jews the kingdom of heaven almost three years, with more pains on his side, than profit on theirs. Because they followed him, rather to start cross questions, than to learn; or contented themselves with the bare admiration of a doctrine they had no inclination to practise. And now the time of his passion drew near, and the last scene of man's redemption. He resolved therefore to repair to Jerusalem, the capital of Judea, and there, in the sight of the world, to act the patient, in the most dismal tragedy that ever was, or will be represented. *And Jesus took unto him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold we go up to Jerusalem.* He ordered his disciples to accompany him, to be witnesses of his sufferings, as some had been of his glory on Tabor, and all of his miracles. And that they might not suspect, that violence rather nail'd him to the cross than choice, he enter'd on a detail of his passion, to convince them, that it was not less easy for him to avoid death, than to foresee it; and that his enemies rage could swell no higher than his goodness permitted. *For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully intreated and spit on.* But if he laid open the infamy of his death, he forgot not the glory of his resurrection, *(and the third day he shall rise again)* to teach his followers, that there is another life beyond this, and that they shall receive the just punishment of their crimes, or the recompence of their virtues.

And certainly the doctrine of the resurrection is the fundamental point of the christian religion; this

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is the basis, on which stands the hope of future rewards, and the fear of torments: it withdraws men from criminal excesses, and animates them to the practice of the most sublime virtues. For who would bridle passion and baulk appetite, did he not fear an after-reckoning? And who would be at the charge of purchasing christian perfection (so contrary to the bent of corrupt nature) did not the expectation of a glorious resurrection embolden him? The saint, who is the most happy of men, would be the most miserable, did his soul expire with his body, and his hope and fear sleep eternally in the grave together. But seeing we only begin properly to live, when we die; and that we shall then receive the blessed fruit of our past labours; what man in his wits will not embrace all the hardships in this world, for a happy eternity in the next?

But the apostles *understood none of these things*: they were so prepossess'd with the persuasion that their master would mount the throne of Judæa, and that they should share in his temporal greatness, that they supposed he talked of whips and death, to try their fidelity, or to experience whether they loved his person more than his fortune, and their own interest.

However, I wonder not, that men of mean capacities, brought up in a law that promised milk and honey, that is, temporal blessings; who had not seen the resurrection of their Master, nor received the Holy Ghost; who had but faint views of the other world, and dull perceptions of those high and abstruse mysteries; should not comprehend how God could suffer the immortal to die, or dying rise again the third day. But it is stupendous, that Christians in our age, who have suck'd almost with their nurses milk the belief of the christian fundamentals, should notwithstanding live, as if they neither understood, nor believed them. Who
would

would not think Christ's passion were a scandal to Christians, as it was in St. Paul's time to the Jews? That the resurrection of the flesh appeared as fabulous to us, as it did to the magistrates of Athens? And that it is a doctrine more proper to raise laughter, than to deserve belief?

For if Christ had suffer'd for us, and entred into his glory, by the mortifying fatigues of a laborious life, and the violence of a most ignominious death; would not one imagine that Christians courted crosses here both out of gratitude and interest? That if they received them not with joy, they bore them at least with resignation? But alas! We are so far from accepting them with patience, that we break out into the most unbecoming transports of impatience. We blaspheme Providence, and rack conscience to ease our bodies. We make wry faces at the lightest touch; as if our sins deserved no punishment, and patience no reward. Would not one imagine, that the practice of piety were their only employment, who expected a resurrection? That they contemned all the false glittering of this world, to find a recompence in the other? Yet it is certain, our thoughts dwell eternally upon earth; for the purchase of a few acres, we often violate all the laws of nature and humanity. We charge through all the decencies of this life, and all the terrors of the next. So that at best we must confess, our belief of those mysteries is faint and drowsy; it goes no further than speculation; which is insignificant, unless it prompts us to practice. We must therefore continually beseech God to open our eyes and inflame our wills, that we may discover these truths, and model our actions by their direction.

Whilst our Saviour was on his way, he met a blind man. *And it came to pass, that as he was come nigh unto Jericho, a certain blind man sat by*

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the way-side begging. He begged a relief, to support a wretched life, without a thought of recovering his sight. He no sooner heard our Saviour was passing by, but, raising his voice, he cried out, not for money, but mercy, *Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me.* And tho' the multitude chid his importunity, and commanded silence, he urged his petition with more vehemence. And his perseverance obtain'd the favour desired with so much earnestness, and ask'd with so much eagerness. *And immediately he receiv'd his sight.*

Our Saviour was hastening to his passion: He never returned from Jerusalem; so that had this blind man neglected this occasion, he had in all probability died as blind as he lived. This passage discovers a terrible truth, that there are certain moments in the course of our lives, on which our All depends; that, if well managed, they secure heaven; if ill, hell. And what ought most to awake our fear and care, is, we know them not. There are ways that lead to life, and others that lead to death. And that we take one rather than the other, depends upon a casualty, an accident, *viz.* upon hearing, or not hearing a sermon; upon reading, or not reading a book; upon speaking, or not speaking to such a person. I do not say, our salvation, or damnation, depends on such actions, or omissions, as on the immediate causes of either; God forbid. For salvation is not the immediate effect of hearing (for example) a sermon, nor damnation of not hearing one; but they either put us into the way that leads to life, or into that which conveys to death. To make this truth intelligible to the weakest capacity, give me leave to mention an adventure, the great St. Austin thought fit to recommend to posterity.

When the emperor gave the people of Trevers the famous spectacles of the Circus, two gentlemen
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of the court, either disgusted with the frequent fights of those pompous, but vain amusements, or apprehending their length, left the theatre, to breathe the fresh air of the country. They walked from one place to another, till they fell upon a little grove; the pleasant solitude of the place invites them to enter; they find an hermitage, and in it the penitent inhabitant of the poor cottage. Whilst they admire the modesty of the hermit, the straightness of the lodging, the poverty of the furniture, one of them espies a book on a little table; he opens it; it was the life of the great St. Anthony: Curiosity tempts him to run it over; he reads it with pleasure first, then with transport, and in the end with a resolution to imitate it. He lays the book down, and turning to his companion with a sigh, *Pray tell me, said he, what is it we pretend to obtain by these our fatigues? What are we in search of?* Life is short, youth frail, strength uncertain; rivals are many, and offices few. *What is therethat is not fleeting, and full of danger?* continued he. I am resolved this very moment, and in this very place, to devote myself wholly to God; and if you, my dear friend, will not imitate my example, endeavour not to hinder my resolution. In a word, they both lock'd themselves up in this small cell, flung up all pretensions to the grandeurs of this world; never greater, never more famous in the very esteem of the world, than when they contemned it.

Now what was the occasion of these two gentlemen's conversion, the beginning of that happy way, that led them to heaven? Nothing but their retiring from the plays of the Circus. Hence to pass their time, and to breathe the fresh air, they resolved to take a turn in the fields. This led them to an hermitage; here they found a book; the reading of it inflamed their hearts with extraordinary sentiments of devotion; these grew into a desire of imitating

the saint, and that into an efficacious resolution. Hence followed the practice of virtues, suitable to the state of penitents ; and this ended in a never-ending felicity. Had they entertained their curiosity with the gaudy amusements of the theatre, it is more than probable this good fortune had never befallen them. For, as the scripture assures us, all things are tied to certain opportunities. *There is a time for all things.* It is ten to one, they had followed the court, and embraced its maxims ; they had run on in the quest of honour and employments, in amorous intrigues, and the practice of all those vices that wait on courts, and flow in upon us with plenty and titles. These gentlemen therefore owed their salvation to the absenting themselves from the theatre: this was the first step, that set them in the narrow path, that convey'd them to heaven ; and, if we could trace the wickedness of the damned, and the virtues of the blessed, up to their source, we should find the misery of those, and the happiness of these, to be occasioned by a meer accident. By chance I fall into the company of a woman ; her person pleases ; her discourse charms ; her wit sparkles : these qualities force esteem ; this passes into love ; and love into disorders : one crime treads on the heels of another. Jealousy begins the tragedy ; rivals carry it on ; and a duel puts an end to the criminal commerce, to begin its punishment in hell. Now what puts this man into the *way of death*, but an accidental conversation ? Another, wedded to the world, sunk in sin, entangled in ill habits, either to criticise the preacher, or save appearances, sits at a sermon ; he hears by chance these emphatick words of our Saviour ; *What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul*, Matth. xvi. 26. They flash immediately light, and fire ; that in his understanding, this in his heart. In a moment he sees and feels the
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vanity of all sublunary things, and that no good is sterling that must end. He measures the emptiness of future brutalities by the baseness of the past; and concludes, it is a folly to continue in those excesses, he must once repent of here, or ever deplore hereafter. This discourse spreads sorrow through every joint; he examines his conscience, confesses his sins, avoids new engagements, detests the past, lives well, and dies better. What is the occasion of this sudden change? He heard a sermon; God put those words into the mouth of the preacher, and at the same time inwardly moved his heart; had he been absent, he might have lived a debauchee, and died a reprobate. What must we gather from what I have said, but that nothing must be esteemed little, which may be the occasion of a great good, or a great evil; that we must not overlook the least opportunity of doing a good action, nor run head over head into any danger of committing a bad one: that we must lay hold of all occasions to secure our salvation, the first moment they are presented us; for they quickly pass, and seldom return.

When the blind man cried out for help, the company, instead of pitying his misfortune, reprehended his importunity. But the desire of recovering his sight overcame the reprimands of the multitude, *but he cried so much the more*; and his perseverance at last wrought so far upon his opposers, that they conducted him to Jesus. This is a copy of what happens daily to those, who break with the world, and repent of their former disorders. Have you a mind (says one) to turn your brains, and to fit yourself for Bedlam? Are you mad? Why all this pother? these tears? this fasting? this reservedness? You over-do it. A hearty *have mercy on me* is much easier, and more efficacious, than grimace and melancholy. Are you
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the only true Christian in the world? the only penitent? why will you throw up all content for God's favour, when you may purchase it at a less expence of trouble and self-denial? But penitent Christians bear up against these buffoons, condemn their raillery, and pity their impiety: if you persevere, their insolence will end in admiration, and their mockeries in esteem. They will lead you to Christ by their praise, who endeavoured to withdraw you from him by laughter and irony. They change their tone, and begin to say: Behold a great man, a saint! happy he, on whom the Almighty bestows such favours! they honour, congratulate, and speak well of him, whom a little before they reprov'd. For it is certain, the profligate wretches, who practise vice, esteem virtue; nay, and honour those who dismiss all criminal satisfactions, to possess it.

Open my eyes, O Lord, that I may see the favours thou hast heaped on me; and raise in my heart a true sense of gratitude. If thou hast suffered the extremity of torments for the sins of others, it is just I should undergo some pain, some mortification, for my own. I will therefore carry those crosses, you shall please to send, not only without murmur, but even with joy. I offer my body to diseases, my reputation to calumny, and my person to contempt. I will neither court the esteem of men, nor blush at their satires; for I know that cannot render me better in thy fight, nor these worse; my only desire is to gain thy favour, and my endeavour shall be to deserve it.

II. EPISTLE to the Corinthians, Chap. vi. Verse

1. *We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also, that ye receive not the grace of God in vain :*

2. *(For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee : behold, now is the accepted time ; behold, now is the day of salvation)*

3. *Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed :*

4. *But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses ;*

5. *In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings :*

6. *By pureness, by knowledge, by long-suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned,*

7. *By the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left,*

8. *By honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report : as deceivers, and yet true ;*

9. *As unknown, and yet well known ; as dying, and behold, we live ; as chastened, and not killed ;*

10. *As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing ; as poor, yet making many rich ; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.*

The MORAL REFLECTION.

THE apostle tells the Corinthians, that the long-expected time of salvation, so often foretold by the prophets, was at length come, *Behold, now is the day of salvation*, and that by the grace of God they did partake of the benefit, having

having received the gospel preached by the Messias, and published to all the world by the ministry of the apostles. But then he conjures them not to receive *the grace of God in vain*; that is, not to believe as Christians, and live like Pagans; not to give in their name to Christ, and their heart to the devil; but to square their lives by the sanctity of their profession, and to take care that their practice answer the purity of their faith.

And, that they may be more animated to break through all the opposition of flesh and blood, to shake off all those ill habits, and worse principles, taken up in idolatry, he assures them of God's assistance, who will not refuse to supply them with grace, which Christ merited for all men by the effusion of his precious blood, and at the expence of his life. *Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.*

As, among other things, in which we are to approve ourselves as the ministers of God, FASTING is mentioned, I shall take occasion, from this passage of scripture, to treat of that duty, and to shew how a Christian may perform it as he ought, whenever he is call'd upon by the Church to *fast* and *pray*, and particularly in the holy season of *Lent*.

The fast of forty days is as ancient as Christianity, instituted by the apostles, practised by their disciples, and handed down to us by an uninterrupted tradition. It was, no doubt, first introduced as a memorial of our Saviour's fast in the wilderness.

Certainly no means is more proper to draw down God's mercy upon us than prayer, joined with fasting. And therefore in the old law, when he called the people to repentance, he enjoined fasting, as well as prayers and tears; *Turn ye unto*
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me with all your hearts, with fasting and with weeping, Joel ii. 12. And our blessed Saviour supposes it as a duty, when he commands us to fast in secret, and promises a reward, if it be done with an intention to please God, not to draw the vain applause of men: without doubt then it is convenient for all men, even the the most innocent; yet it is much more fit for sinners who implore mercy; for it kindles our zeal, and so increases our sorrow. Besides, it is a kind of revenge upon ourselves for our former excesses, which is a special part of repentance; for, by refusing our bodies their common nourishment we punish them for their past intemperance, and for all those other sins we have committed, merely to gratify our senses. Yet those, who cannot find in their hearts to impose this mortification upon themselves, the immediate instrument of their sins, shew they are not much angry with themselves for committing them; and therefore they ought to fear God will treat their souls with severity proportioned to the tenderness with which they cherish their bodies. This is a certain maxim, that God will punish those who spare themselves, and purge our excesses with fire, if we cleanse them not with tears and mortification.

Those who intend to pass the *Lent* like good Christians, must first abstain from all meats, which nourish and inflame the passions; and, as flesh is the most apt to pamper the body, a good Christian will chiefly abstain from this.

But, tho' this rule seems universal, it reaches not those, who are under age; nor those who by reason of old age cannot abstain, without prejudice to their health, or danger of impairing it; nor those who lie under any infirmity, that by advice of the doctor requires flesh.

Secondly,

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Secondly, Those, who by reason of infirmity are exempted from the obligation, must manage the exemption in order to their health, not to their palate. And therefore they should abstain from delicacies, which pamper indeed the senses, but weaken the body, and rather multiply distempers than procure health. I will not determine how far people may offend in this case : this at least is certain, that tho' they transgress not the precept of fasting, in the sense of abstaining from flesh, they may easily violate that of temperance, and so offend against the law of nature.

Some will not go to the trouble or expence of consulting a physician, but pass sentence in favour of themselves, merely because they find a difficulty to fast. But, if this excuse were sufficient, the precept would fall upon a very few. For who finds not a difficulty to curb appetite, and to refuse nourishment to a craving stomach ? Fasting was imposed, because it mortified the body, not because it obliges sense. And were it as easy to fast as to feast, what reward could we expect ? or what satisfaction could we make for our sins ? All satisfaction consists in a penal action ; and surely, where there is no difficulty, there is no pain.

But to observe an exact and canonical abstinence, is not enough, to comply with the intention of the precept. Abstinence is fruitless, if we are sullied with sin ; and in vain do we macerate our bodies, if our souls are dead to God. The greatest austerities, practised in sin, neither deserve a reward in the next world, no, nor even in this. *Tho' I give all my goods to the poor, and my body to be burnt, if I have not charity, I am nothing,* 1 Cor. xiii. 5. These actions may indeed dazzle the eyes of men, who judge by appearance, but they will not procure one grain of glory.

Thirdly,

Thirdly, Let therefore every Christian, who feels his conscience charged with the guilt of mortal sin, begin *Lent* with an hearty and sincere confession, accompanied with an unfeigned sorrow, and a firm purpose of amendment. Thus he will perform his duty with more chearfulness and profit; he will find God more propitious to his prayers, and more liberal in his favours. For, certainly, the petitions of a friend are more acceptable than those of an enemy; they meet with a more kind reception, and are granted with more ease and cordiality.

Fourthly, Let him spend some time, every day, either in reading or meditating upon the sacred passion of our Saviour. A man must have lost the sensible part of his nature, not to be touch'd by so moving a subject, and must be almost as obstinate as the damned souls, not to dissolve into tears of compassion and repentance. For who can behold his Creator upon a cross for his sake, without returning gratitude and love for such a superlative kindness? And who can reflect that his sins were the cause of this torment, without detesting them? Besides, this will raise in us a strong confidence and a lively hope. For, as St. Paul says, He, who has given us his Son, will refuse us nothing, when his precious blood and gaping wounds plead in our favour.

Fifthly, As much as your state and circumstances will permit, retire into solitude, and withdraw from those assemblies that meet for mirth and diversion; they are always dangerous, but in *Lent* criminal and scandalous. The wise man tells us, that musick grates upon the ears of a person in grief and sadness: plays, methinks, and balls in *Lent*, should be as displeasing to a Christian. If they offend not his senses of hearing or seeing, I am sure they must disoblige his reason. For what
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can be more preposterous than to mourn and rejoice at the same time? than to invoke God's mercy with tears and sighs in the morning, and to provoke his justice in the afternoon, by frequenting these spectacles, that at least expose you to danger, if they plunge you not into sin? and, if they let not in bad thoughts, they refuse entrance to pious ones.

Sixthly, Let alms accompany your fasting and prayers: these two indeed plead hard for pardon; but all three are almost irresistible. Daniel could prescribe Nebuchadnezzar no means more effectual to avert God's anger, than alms-deeds; *Break off thine iniquities, by shewing mercies to the poor*, Dan. iv. 27. For God cannot chuse but be merciful to those, who have a tenderness for their distress'd brethren; and those, who relieve their temporal necessities, will receive spiritual blessings, and perchance temporal also. Our Saviour protests, that you give him whatsoever you bestow upon his members; *what you do to the least of these, you do to me*: so that when you cloath the naked, you cover his nakedness on the cross; when you give drink to the thirsty, you change his gall and vinegar into wine; you pour oil into his wounds, and refreshment into all his tortured limbs; and can any one think he will not put this expence to your account, and that he will not return mercy for mercy, and pardon for charity?

Give me strength, O God, to support this abstinence, and grace to acquit my self of all the other duties thy religion expects from her obedient professors. It is fit at least to baulk appetite some weeks, having indulged it the whole year, and to fast out those sins I have committed by riot and intemperance. It is better to suffer the pangs of hunger here, than hereafter; to drink water, than
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to be denied one drop in hell, to cool my parched tongue.

GOSPEL of St. Matthew, Chap. iv. Verse

1. *Then was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.*

2. *And when he had fasted forty days, and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred.*

3. *And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.*

4. *But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.*

5. *Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple,*

6. *And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thy self down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee, and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.*

7. *Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.*

8. *Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them:*

9. *And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me*

10. *Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.*

11. *Then the devil leaveth him, and behold, angels came and ministered unto him.*

The MORAL REFLECTION.

OUR blessed Saviour had now spent thirty years in obscurity, scarce known to any, but Joseph and Mary. He confined himself to the narrow compass of a poor cottage; subject to all those inconveniencies that wait on poverty. But the time being come, ordained by his heavenly Father, for manifesting himself to the world, and promulging his gospel, he retires into the wilderness, and there he spends forty days in contemplation, fasting and solitude. Why this retreat? why this rigorous preparation for his mission? He could not distrust his virtue, being the source and fountain of grace and piety: he had no reason to fear the infection of the world, the contagion of bad example or loose conversation: the hypostatical union placed him in a region above sin; he was not subject to sallies of passion and concupiscence. St. Gregory, in my opinion, suggests the motive of this retirement, when he says, *That our blessed Saviour's works stand often in place of commands; intimating what we ought to practise after his example.* He would read all pastors and apostolical men a lesson of precaution and prudence, and teach them by the example of his retirement, that the conversion of souls is a dangerous, tho' a charitable employment, and therefore they must provide themselves with a large stock of virtue, before they undertake to recommend it, and preach it up to their neighbour. It is hard to discharge all the duties of a Christian, even in the company of the most virtuous: how difficult then must it be, when mixt with those, who are scarce Christians in their belief, and scarce men in their practice? Vice is catching and attractive, and draws us more violently from our duty,

ty, than reason, and often than grace itself, to it. With how great a stock of virtue therefore must those be furnished, who daily converse with sinners, without being overcome by the impiety of their maxims, and looseness of their practice! They must therefore, with our blessed Saviour, withdraw from company, before they enter upon the conversion of souls, examine the dangers, and arm themselves by fasting and prayers against them: otherwise, tho' they send some to heaven, they may send themselves to hell; which certainly is a preposterous way of playing the apostle.

It is no wonder therefore our Saviour was led into the desert; nor is it strange he was led by the Holy Ghost. For what other guide could he have in all the motions of his soul and body? But that he should be guided into a wilderness, to be tempted of the devil, is astonishing. The very thought of so strange a thing shocks our reason, and the very hearing of it strikes us with horror. But, however, it is not so surprising that Christ would permit himself to be tempted by the devil in the wilderness, seeing he was pleased to suffer himself to be crucified by his members, Pilate and the Jews, on Calvary. It was not therefore below the Majesty of our Redeemer to be tempted, who came into the world to be crucified. Nay, it was convenient, that by suffering himself to be tempted, by his own temptations he should overcome ours, as by his death he conquered ours.

St. Paul assures us, he took upon himself all our infirmities, to teach us how we should behave our selves in them to advantage. For he gave us his life as a model, as well as his blood for a ransom. *Wherefore, in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high-priest.* Heb. ii. 17. As if he should say, seeing Christ was sent into the

world by his heavenly Father, not only as a Redeemer, but also as a Teacher, it was convenient he should partake of our miseries, and animate us by his example, as well as strengthen us by his grace. If Christ therefore was tempted; no man must wonder if he be. The condition of a servant ought not to be better than that of his master ; nor that of the members than that of the head. Our Redeemer might indeed have freed us by his death from temptation, as well as from sin ; he might have quelled the violence of our passions, and restored us, tho' not to the state, at least to the privileges of innocence ; but he resolved to give us his glory as a reward, not as a free-gift. And for this reason, he left us enemies to combat, but furnishes us with strength to overcome ; so that our force to resist is greater than the devil's to attack us : we may surrender, but God will not suffer us to be forced : we may yield voluntarily, but cannot be overpowered. No man then can justly complain of God's conduct, who has placed us in the midst of enemies, seeing the reward of our victory is beyond comparison above the labour or the combat ; nay, and certain also, unless we turn traitors to ourselves, and defeat God's designs by our own cowardise. Besides, God permits his friends to be tempted, to try their virtue, and to encrease it. Alas ! it is hard to distinguish true virtue from counterfeit, and nothing can ascertain us but the touch-stone of temptation. How easy is it to persuade ourselves we are humble, till we see ourselves contemned ! that we are patient, till we feel the pangs of a disease, or receive affronts from our enemies ! St. Peter fancied he had such an unshaken affection for his Master, that it was proof against torments, and even death it self ; but a slight temptation discovered his error, and he has left to posterity a convincing proof that he mistook

mistook presumption for constancy, and an impulse of nature for that of the Holy Ghost. Secondly, To teach them humility, and to force them continually to stand upon their guard. How can a man harbour thoughts of pride, who beholds himself within an inch of falling into sins, that cast him below the level of the vilest insect, that good men blush at, and even the worst dare not own? Certainly, a Christian will confess his baseness, who reflects how often he falls into small sins, in spite of all his vigilance; and what a violent impulse hurries him to the greatest; nay, and that he would fall into them, if God's merciful hand did not withhold him, and his grace withdraw him from the precipice.

God had favoured St. Paul with revelations and extasies; he had taken him up to the third heaven, and disclosed those high mysteries to him he had hid from others; yet to teach the apostle humility, and that these divine communications were the effects of his pure bounty, not of St. Paul's own perfection, he suffered him to fall into temptations, even of the flesh. *And lest I should be exalted above measure, through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan, to buffet me,* 2 Cor. xii. 7. And this did expose to St. Paul his own weakness in so lively colours, that he confessed, that, tho' with God's assistance, the practice of all virtues was easy, without it the exercise of the least was impossible.

But the time, when the devil attack'd our blessed Saviour, deserves attention; it was, according to St. Matthew, after he had received baptism from the hands of St. John; after his eternal Father had publickly declared him his beloved Son; after his retirement into the desert, and a most strict fast of forty days and forty nights. "These circumstances," says the great St. Gregory, teach

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“ us, that all Christians must prepare themselves
 “ to suffer temptations, but especially when they
 “ first break with the world, and withdraw from
 “ a licentious life, to practise the more severe
 “ maxims of the gospel; nay, when they have
 “ made good progress in virtue, mortified their
 “ passions by prayer and abstinence, and removed
 “ from the commerce and conversation of the
 “ world.” “ Christ, says St. Ambrose, chose the
 “ time of his retreat and fasting to be assaulted by
 “ the devil, to teach mankind, that the most per-
 “ fect are often more tempted than the imperfect,
 “ and that those have the greatest reason to fear the
 “ devil’s malice, who resolve most efficaciously to
 “ abandon him.”

Whilst St. Austin pass’d his time in lewdness and riot, he run on without trouble, and even without remorse; but when grace began to get the upper-hand of concupiscence, and he resolved to abandon the unlawful pleasures of the flesh, and cancel his past crimes by baptism and mortification, then (as he tells in his confessions) the devil declared war against him, and planted the most powerful engines his malice could invent, to fright him from his resolutions: he laid before him the charms of his past life in so lively colours, and all the austerities of the future, that tho’ he could not resolve to continue in his former course, he would not resolve to leave it. Incontinence was represented to his imagination as necessary, chastity as impossible; and the practice of all other Christian virtues, as a task too hard to be performed by men; and when grace press’d him to a speedy resolution, the devil put him upon delays. If you will, says he, change your conduct, at least stay for a convenient season; do nothing in a hurry; a year or two will break no squares; hasty resolutions are followed by repentance.

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I believe few resolve to mend their lives, who find not themselves attack'd with the same arms St. Austin was: the devil will not lose his prey without a combat; and, if he perceives we abandon his service in good earnest, he doubles our difficulties, as Pharaoh did the hardships of the Jews, when he saw they were resolved to break their chains, and to sacrifice to God in the wilderness. A thousand scruples torment them day and night; the more they endeavour to obtain God's mercy, the more they apprehend his justice, always unsatisfied, always tormented, either with the apprehension that they presume too much on God's goodness, or with despair of his mercy.

We must not be discouraged at the prospect of these difficulties, nor fancy God frowns upon us because he suffers us to be tempted; nay, we rather should draw from thence an argument of his favour: because you were pleasing to God (said the angel to Tobias) it was necessary to put your virtue to the test. The Son of God himself has pass'd this trial, and all those that follow his footsteps must expect the same treatment. The Holy Ghost has declared this truth by the mouth of the apostle; *All that will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution*, 2 Tim. iii. 12. So that tho' we are tempted with the most blasphemous and foul suggestions, we must neither repine at our troublesome circumstances, nor suspect God of severity: for it is no sin to be tempted, but to consent. Nay, oftentimes the most humble are infested with the most proud thoughts, and the most chaste with the most impure.

All that we can do, is to implore God's grace continually, who never refuses it to those who ask it with sincerity, confidence and perseverance. A Christian should indeed always pray; but in time of a strong temptation he is more especially obliged

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to sue for and implore God's assistance ; for without it we shall certainly fall, and God seldom bestows an efficacious grace on those who will not take pains to ask the favour.

Secondly, We must avoid the occasion, if it be manifest and dangerous ; for the very exposing our selves to an imminent danger of offending God, is an offence. Nay, we must (as much as we can) avoid all occasion, altho' remote, and never run headlong into danger without necessity. For tho' God can no more refuse us his grace, than he can to take us under the protection of his providence, when we use all care to keep our selves out of the reach of temptation ; so he has no obligation to give us a peculiar assistance, if we thrust our selves voluntarily upon the danger.

The order, the devil used in tempting our blessed Saviour, shews us by what means he withdraws the most perfect from virtue. The devil was not sure of Christ's divinity, tho' he was of his extraordinary sanctity, *If thou be the Son of God*, said he.

Wherefore, convinc'd of the latter, and uncertain of the former, he durst not tempt him to a barefac'd impiety ; for he knew it is very hard to persuade a man to pass in a moment from a high perfection into great vices. He began therefore by degrees ; *If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.* Here appeared no crime. For why could not Christ work a miracle in his own favour, as well as in the desert to feed five thousand people ? Then he places him upon a pinnacle of the temple, and exhorts him to manifest his Divinity by a miracle ; *If thou be the Son of God, cast thy self down* : and then enforced the temptation with scripture ; *He shall give his angels charge concerning thee, and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou*

dash thy foot against a stone. These temptations were suggested to make way for the greatest. He therefore carries Christ up to a mountain, whence he might take a boundless prospect of delicious vales, and promises to put him in possession of all the land he actually surveyed; *All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.*

Thus the temptation rises by degrees from things indifferent and less perfect, to idolatry, the most enormous of crimes.

The devil, who, like a lion, walks his round to devour souls, and bends all his craft and malice to ensnare them, never attempts, at the first assault, to draw into a mortal sin those who have a long time practised virtue, and attained a considerable perfection: no, this conduct would expose his treason, and lay open his malice and our own danger; and then immediately, with our blessed Saviour, we should repel our enemy with a *Get thee hence Satan*, and we should fly for sanctuary into our heavenly Father's arms. He therefore begins his approaches at a distance, out of sight, and takes in the guards and defences of our innocence, before he dares assail innocence itself. He first persuades us to defer our devotions, then to omit them: what you have undertaken, says he, without any obligation, you may lay aside without sin.

Nay, too much intenseness enfeebles the brain, and too great a retirement foment melanchoy. God loves a chearful virtue; a virtue that has nothing starch'd, nothing wild or surly. There are entertainments that divert without danger, and conversations that are pleasing and not criminal. What harm now and then to pass an hour or two in the company of such a lady; she is modest and virtuous; she is lively indeed, but it is her humour. There seems no harm in all this. But the devil knows our depraved constitution too well to think we shall
stop

stop here. For visits, tho' innocent, breed familiarity; this kindles love; then follow kind expressions; soon after secret rendezvous; and, in fine, prostitution. Thus from a spark breaks out a fire, from a harmless beginning the loss of virtue and innocence. The best and most sure way to overcome, is to follow our Saviour's example, and repell the tempter with a *Get thee hence Satan*. Suppress the first suggestion; tho' it appears innocent, it hides a great deal of malice; and tho' it be not dangerous in itself, it is mortal in its consequence. Dinah, Jacob's daughter, would needs make a visit to the ladies of Canaan. A female curiosity only began the tragedy; that ended in the loss of her honour, and the murder of the inhabitants of Sichem.

Oh Lord! I ask not to be exempt from temptation, but not to be overcome: Thy kingdom, I know, must be conquered by force: give me strength to overthrow those enemies that oppose my endeavours. I refuse not the trouble of the combat, for the pleasure of ease; give me the victory, and I embrace the labour.

I. EPISTLE to the Thessalonians, Chap. iv. Verse

1. *Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk, and to please God, so ye would abound more and more.*

2. *For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus.*

3. *For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication.*

4. *That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour.*

5. *Not*

5. *Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God.*

6. *That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter ; because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you, and testified.*

7. *For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.*

8. *He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his Holy Spirit.*

THE MORAL REFLECTION.

THE apostle exhorts the Thessalonians to lead holy, pure and chaste lives, that resemble the original they pretend to copy (Jesus Christ) and are conformable to the sanctity of the religion they profess. He tells them what they must do to discharge this obligation, *viz.* that they must stand to those instructions he has delivered them, and square their conduct by the precepts he received from God, and published by his order ; *for ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus.* He persuades them not in this place merely to observe the commandments ; for it seems they were not guilty of the breach of any essential part of their duty ; nay, they had made a considerable progress in virtue ; but he encourages them to go on, *that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk, and to please God, so ye would abound more and more.*

As if he should say, O Thessalonians, I have taught you your duty, what you must do to please God, what vices you must avoid, what virtues you must practise ; and I confess you have made some proficiency ; but you must not stop here ; our Saviour expects more at your hands ; you must go on
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from virtue to virtue, and practise them all to the highest perfection ; you must look upon yourselves always as beginners, and never leave off the pursuit of holiness, till you cease to live. For he commands you not to sit down with a moderate piety ; no, you must carry it to the highest pitch ; for this is the will of God, *your sanctification*. St. Paul address'd not his epistle to bishops or priests, but to seculars ; to the rich, as well as the poor ; to the prince on the throne, and to the peasant on the dunghill ; and he tells them, they must not only resist sin, but embrace virtue ; nay, that the quality of a Christian imposes an obligation to advance in perfection, as we do in years ; not to stand at the lowest, but to speed to the highest ; *for this is the will of God, your sanctification* ; and therefore, in another place, he conjures his converts to imitate him, as he does Christ. If once you stop, you go back ; for, in the way of virtue, not to go forward is to go backward ; and if you say, I have perfection enough, in St. Austin's opinion, you are undone.*

I know, seculars suppose themselves exempt from this obligation, and think they discharge their duty to a tittle, if they abstain from mortal sin ; as for perfection (say they) it is no branch of our profession, and comes not within the precinct of our calling : the clergy indeed can plead no exemption ; their life is a state of denial and penance ; of mortification and discipline ; they must trail their crosses to Calvary, before they can ascend Tabor.

But certainly this is a mistake ; for our blessed Saviour commands every one to be perfect ; *Be ye perfect, as your Father, which is in heaven, is perfect*, Matt. v. 48. Nay, and to contend for the highest sanctity ; and St. Jerome affirms, *That it is a sin to say, I*

* *Semper tibi displiceat quod es, si vis pervenire ad id quod non es : si dixeris, sufficit, periisti.* S. Aug.

will not be perfect. * Besides, St. Paul teaches, that the perfection of the law of grace is the love of God; and our blessed Saviour requires of us, that we should give him our heart entirely: *Ye shall love the Lord your God with all your soul, and with all your strength:* This is not only address'd to ecclesiasticks, but to all the world; nor is it only recommended as a counsel, but imposed as an obligatory precept; and without doubt, it enjoins the practice of the most sublime virtue; for it not only forbids us to fall into mortal sins in general, but even into venial ones: tho' these are consistent with the love of God, yet they are not with that perfection, which the commandment requires, that bids us love God *with all our heart, and with all our soul.* If we settle our affection upon any created object, without relation to God, we divide our hearts, and consequently sin, because we make over to creatures what properly belongs to the Creator; for it is impossible to love God with all our hearts, and at the same time to love the creature; to give him our whole hearts, and part of it to things below him.

It is certain, therefore, that this command obliges to a great perfection; and were our care to observe it as great as the obligation, we should be what St. Paul often calls all Christians, Saints.

For then our hearts would lodge in heaven, tho' our bodies dwelt on earth, and we should live retired, in the midst of hurry and business; for did we love God *with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our strength,* we should submit our wills entirely to his, and receive from his hand, with the same chearfulness, adversity and prosperity; the good things of this life, and the bad; those that cross nature, and those that oblige it; in fine, we should return our hearts to him that made them;

* *Perfectum esse nolle, delinquere est.* S. Hier.

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and this is the supreme end of man, his greatest happiness, and consequently his ultimate perfection in this life.

Besides this universal law that takes in all mankind, there is another that binds us as Christians; for what is a Christian, but a man that has protested at the baptismal font, that he submitted to the law of Christ, and that he would observe it with fidelity? A man, that has ranged himself under the standard of Jesus Christ; that has sworn to declare himself an enemy to his enemies? A man, that has renounced all pretensions to honours, to pleasures, to fortunes and friendships, that might withdraw him from Christ's service, or pretend to share in his affection? In fine, a Christian is a man, that by profession wars upon the world, that renounces all alliance with the devil, all truce with any inordinate passion; and whosoever, after baptism, fails in the execution of these points, is guilty of perjury; he is in name a Christian, in manners a Pagan; a true believer before the use of reason, an apostate after it.

Now, we being engaged by our baptismal vow to the observance of these articles, have we not a pressing obligation to tend to a great perfection? For unless we carry a severe hand over our thoughts, unless we force our appetites to rule and discipline, and absolutely postpone the satisfaction of sense to the pain of mortifying it, we shall never discharge all these duties with fidelity. What stock of virtue is required to live in the world, as if we were out of it? to carry us through all those difficulties that oppose us? to remove those impediments that lye in our way? You are rich; is it easy to possess wealth without attachment? to separate your heart from your treasure? to lodge this in your closet, and that in heaven? You are poor; will a small virtue support want with patience? and extreme

reme necessity without murmur? You are sick; will an ordinary piety resign you to the will of providence? will it persuade you to receive from the hand of the Almighty a fit of the gout or stone, with the same sentiments as health? or to lose an estate for a just cause, with as much content as you gain one? The quality of Christian obliges all to these duties, and to use all temporal things as steps to heaven; we must love nothing, esteem nothing, but with relation to the other world; that is our country, our land of promise; this is but a passage, a wilderness, through which we wander, to enter into our Canaan; and therefore we must behave ourselves like pilgrims here, not like inhabitants; and regard all these objects we meet in our way with indifference and unconcernedness.

Moreover, the quality of Christian obliges us to follow our leader Jesus Christ; his heavenly Father has given him not only as a teacher, but as a pattern, *This is my beloved Son; hear ye him*, Matth. xvii. 5. and to imitate his example: his actions are no less the object of our faith, than the mysteries he delivered; and we are bound as much to believe that all he did was well done, as that all he revealed is true: for he was as infallible one way as the other; as therefore he deserves the name of heretick, who refuses to believe what Christ has taught, so they are a sort of hereticks in morality, who will not practise what he did.

St. Paul declares to us, we must resemble our Saviour, to be loved; and our Saviour, *He that followeth not after me, is not worthy of me*, Matth. x. 38. What is it to resemble Christ, but to frame our lives by the model of his; but to labour by the pattern he has set; and so endeavour to come as near the original as human weakness will permit? What is it to follow Christ, but to detest what he hates; and to love, for his sake, what he embrac'd for ours?

So

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So that whosoever takes another way, is unworthy of Christ ; that is, to enjoy him in heaven, and if he be unworthy, he will never come there.

I know Christ did many things that concern not his followers as precepts, but as mere counsels ; and therefore, tho' the practice be laudable, it is not obligatory ; tho' he lived in poverty, Christians may enjoy a comfortable fortune ; but then they must possess it without attachment, and use it without prodigality ; tho' he exercised the trade of a carpenter, Christians may aspire to a higher station ; yet let their dignity be never so lofty, their hearts must be humble, their behaviour meek, and their comportment must shew they serve a crucified God, as well as a temporal prince ; they must do good to all, ill to no man ; never do the least injury, and always pardon those, from whom they receive the greatest ; in fine, *They must pull out their eyes, cut off their hands*, if they are cause of scandal ; that is, they must rather part with all things, than their innocence ; offend all creatures rather than Christ ; and rather forfeit their lives than their souls : these are not advices, but laws ; not counsels but commands, imposed on Christians by our Redeemer ; he practised them first in his life, and then left them in his written word, as standing monuments of his will, and our obligation.

Now, to acquit ourselves of these duties, we must pretend to little in this world ; we must be well exercised in the practice of self-denial ; we must keep our passions low, bridle our resentments, and restrain our desires within a narrow compass ; our faith must be strong, our hope courageous, and our charity inflamed ; *i. e.* we must have made no ordinary provision of virtue.

So that whoever pretends merely to avoid mortal sin, and commits venial without scruple or reluctance, will never live up even to that essential part
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of his duty ; for nature weighs down in spite of grace and resolution, and our actions seldom answer our good purposes ; we must therefore level higher than the mark, if we intend to hit it ; if we resolve first to fly venial sin, we may be so happy as not to fall into mortal ; but if, like St. Peter, we only intend to follow Christ at a distance, we shall certainly quite abandon him.

Oh Jesus ! my Master, my Leader, and my God ! thy baptism made me a Christian, but my life declares me an apostate, and my sins an infidel. I vowed to follow thee, with thy apostle, *wheresoever thou didst go* ; but alas ! contemning thy conduct, I have given myself up to the government of thy enemies, and my own, who have led me to the gates of hell, and thy goodness alone has brought me back. O my Redeemer, conform my judgment to thy doctrine ; I will regulate my actions by thy example ; thou art the Way ; I cannot err by following thee : thou art Truth ; I cannot mistake by believing thee : thou art Life ; how can I die, if I live to thee ; tho' I expire in flames for thy sake ? Thou camest into the world, my God, to teach me to live well ; thou wentest out of it upon the cross, to instruct me to die well : thy death is the example of all happy deaths ; thy life of all virtuous lives. Give me thy grace, to imitate thy life by a perfect charity, and thy death by patience and resignation.

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GOSPEL

GOSPEL of St. Matthew, Chap. xvii. Verse

1. *And after six days, Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart.*

2. *And was transfigured before them, and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.*

3. *And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him.*

4. *Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.*

5. *While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold, a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.*

6. *And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid.*

7. *And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid.*

8. *And when they had lift up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only.*

9. *And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead.*

The MORAL REFLECTION.

IN the preceding chapter, our Saviour declared to his disciples, that he was the Son of God, and commanded them to keep this great mystery secret; then he exposed the whole series of his passion, his ignominious death, and glorious resurrection:

rection: *From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day, Matth. xvi. 21.* Besides, he pass'd from the rehearsal of his own sufferings to that of his disciples. He told them in plain terms, that, if they resolved to follow him, they must prepare themselves to suffer in this world, and to expect the reward of their labours in the other. *If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross, and follow me, ver. 24;* that the only way to save their souls was to lose them for his sake; *for he that will save his life, shall lose it, ver. 25;* that when occasion presented itself, either to die or to betray their conscience, they must rather expose their bodies to the fury of tyrants and cruelty of hangmen, than dissemble their religion to secure their fortunes, or commit a sin to save their lives. Now the first was a mystery hard to be believed, and the second a doctrine not easy to be practised. The apostles were illiterate, and imperfectly acquainted with the secrets of the incarnation; so that they could hardly comprehend how a Being infinitely happy could suffer, and the immortal die; and this difficulty was able to persuade them they misunderstood our Saviour, or to disbelieve the mystery.

On the other side, the doctrine of self-denial and suffering, appeared, no doubt, not only new, but severe, to men brought up in different principles of Judaism, which promised to the observers of its precepts, peace and plenty, and the enjoyment of all those temporal blessings men most eagerly covet, together with an exemption from the inconveniencies of war, and the fear of famine and pestilence, and from all those painful accidents

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that discompose nature, and turn life into a burthen.

First therefore, to confirm the apostles (and in them the faithful of future ages) in the belief of his Divinity, *He was transfigured before them, i. e.* he appeared in glory, that by this vision they might learn, that his being liable to sufferings was an argument of his goodness, not of his weakness; and that, if he pleased, he could render his body not only proof against death, but even against sufferings. But coming into the world as a Saviour (that is) to redeem mankind, by his temporal death, from an eternal one, he would embrace all the miseries that wait on human nature, sin excepted; and, suspending the effects of his glorified soul to influence his body, he left this in its natural capacity of suffering all those torments hell could invent, or the rage of his enemies inflict.

Secondly, Man has such a propensity to those pleasures that gratify the senses, is so taken with present enjoyments, that he will not quit them upon the expectation of the future, without good security; much less will he mortify appetite, crucify his flesh, war upon his passions, unless he has sufficient hopes that the recompence will bear proportion to the labour. Our Saviour therefore, to encourage the apostles to the observance of all his commands, would shew them a glimpse of the reward they were to expect, and convince them, by their own experience, that all the sufferings of this life could not be compared with the recompence God hath prepared for the blessed in the next.

And indeed, St. Peter was so oppress'd with the majesty of his Master, so overset with his glorious appearance, that, quite forgetful of Christ's sufferings and his own, he was wholly taken up with the sweetness of his present felicity; nay, was so

so absorpt in this sea of pleasure, that his only desire was to contemplate that resplendent object eternally. *Let us build*, says he, *three tabernacles*; he required now no other reward for his abandoning all for his Master's sake, but a continuation of the present apparition: this put a stop to all his desires: *It is good for us to be here!* the only apprehension of losing it alarmed his fear, and convinced him something was wanting to make him compleatly happy.

And yet, good God! what is this glorious spectacle, if compared with that which God has prepared for his saints in heaven! All this was but the object of sense; the eye conveyed those rays of glory to the apostles souls, that caused the transport. But the essential happiness of the saints is above sense; neither the eye nor taste can reach it: and as hearts cannot conceive it, so we want words to express it: in fine, we shall possess God himself; for the same object, that makes him happy by nature, will render us happy by his favour. We shall see him *face to face*, says the apostle, that is, not through a mist, or under a borrowed shape framed by the imagination, but *as he is*, with all his perfections. From this knowledge springs necessarily a most ardent love; this transforms us almost into the beloved object; and, by a strange union, puts us in the possession of God himself, and, by consequence, of all his perfections; it carries the creature to the most intimate commerce it can have with God.

This enjoyment stops all our desires, because the object is infinite in all perfection. It places us in a state of impeccability; for it is impossible to possess God, and not love him. It is eternal, and therefore the blessed are as well without fear as without hope. It satiates, yet never gluts, never sur-

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feits ; it irritates the appetite without trouble, and enflames the soul without torment. O the happy State ! What can we desire more than to desire nothing, to fear nothing ; than to be above sin, out of the reach of diseases, and exempt from the jurisdiction of death ?

But, methinks, nothing gives us a more clear idea of the happy estate of the blessed, than the price of the purchase : the Son of God, whose wisdom is infinite, could not be deceived in the value of it ; nor the Father, who is infinitely just, set too high a price upon it. Yet the one would not give it us, unless the other bought it at the expence of his blood ; and our Redeemer thought not he had over-purchased it at so excessive a rate. He led a miserable life three and thirty years, and underwent a painful and ignominious death : in fine, like that merchant, of whom he speaks in the gospel, he bought this jewel at the price of all he possessed, that is, an infinite treasure, and deemed himself happy to have procured it at this exorbitant rate. Seeing therefore the reward of the just bears an exact proportion to the merits of our Saviour, who can comprehend its greatness, but those blessed souls who enjoy it ?

Let us therefore not be so intent upon our sufferings, as quite to forget the greatness of our reward, nor so tie our thoughts to the present, as to leave no place for the consideration of the future. A miscarriage in our estates, a disappointment in our enterprises, a disease borne with patience and resignation to providence, entitles to this glorious state. Nay, St. Paul assures us, that *our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us an exceeding and eternal weight of glory*, 2 Cor. iv. 17. This consideration should sweeten all our pains, and make us support all temporal afflictions,

fictions, not only without impatience, but even with pleasure.

But whilst the apostles, charmed with the sweetness of the pleasure, gave themselves over to the enjoyment, on a sudden *a bright cloud interposed*, and put an end to their extatic rapture. Elias and Moses disappeared, *and only Jesus remained* in his accustomed shape and figure.

This teaches two truths that deserve attention; first, That this life is a state of action and combat, not of repose and happiness: That we must conquer here, to be crowned hereafter; that we must sow with sweat and tears, to reap the fruit of our labours with joy in heaven. God does indeed sometimes feast his servants with divine consolations, but these are fleet and transitory; they are (if I may so say) cordials to refresh and infuse courage, lest they faint in the way, to walk on in the observance of his commandments. In fine, they are rather a pledge of his kindness, than a reward of our virtue; and rather assure us, we shall be happy, than make us so.

Secondly, That Christ never abandons us. Elias vanish'd, and Moses disappeared, but Jesus remained. And when the apostles were as much distracted with fear, as before with pleasure, he revived their courage, and laid their affrighting imagination with a *Fear not*. Tho' friends abandon us, and relations persecute us; tho' diseases prey upon our bodies, injustice upon our estates, and calumnies upon our reputation; yet *Jesus remains*. He stands a spectator of our combats, supplies us with force to overcome, and assures us of a reward; nay, tho' we leave him, he recalls us by his grace; so that nothing can force him to withdraw, but obstinacy and impenitence.

EPISTLE to the Ephesians, Chap. v, Verse

1. *Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children;*

2. *And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour.*

3. *But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named amongst you, as becometh saints:*

4. *Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks.*

5. *For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ, and of God,*

6. *Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.*

7. *Be ye not therefore partakers with them.*

8. *For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light,*

9. *(For the fruit of the spirit is in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth)*

10. *Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord,*

The MORAL REFLECTION.

IN the former chapter, the apostle exhorted the Ephesians to meekness and mercy towards their brethren, because God had pardoned their offences by the merits and death of his Son our Lord Jesus Christ. *Forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you, Ephes. iv. 32. And then*

then he immediately adds: *Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children.*

That is, you profess not the ancient law, in which God allowed *a tooth for a tooth, and an eye for an eye*; but that of grace, preached by his Son, and sealed with his blood. The law of retaliation is revers'd: tho' he permitted it to the Israelites, he will not suffer the practice in Christians, who have learned a more pure morality; and as God has promised them a greater reward, than he did the Jews, so their virtue must rise in proportion. As therefore he has pardoned your offences, you must use the same indulgence to your brethren. He causes the sun to warm the sinner as well as the saint, and to dart as benign rays on the lands of the one as the other. Divide therefore your kindness with an equal hand, and let not him have a greater share in your bounty, who is your friend, than he who is your enemy.

Ask no other motive than this: you are God's children, and he loves you to excess; therefore, as children dearly beloved of your heavenly Father, follow his example, and shew you are sensible of his goodness by imitating it. It is natural for children to approve their parents actions, and to adopt them by practice; no man is so much your father as God; have then the same deference for him: and, as he pours out the riches of his bounty upon all creatures; as he is both liberal and charitable to his enemies, and pardons their offences, whenever they sincerely implore his mercy; so it becomes you to treat your brethren with tenderness and good nature, and forgive, with a Christian generosity, whatever they may have committed against you through oversight or malice. *Walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us.*

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If the example of God your Father makes no impression upon you, let that of Christ, your brother, persuade you, who loved you to so strange a degree, that for our sakes he took on him our nature, espoused our miseries, and in the end fell a sacrifice to our sins, *And bath given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God.*

To imitate God, in the opinion of a heathen philosopher, is the greatest perfection man can attain: as he is the first cause and last end of all things, so his conduct is the rule of human actions; nothing can be perfect that swerves from this pattern; nothing blameable that is squared by it. He is indeed in some things inimitable; he alone has the power to create; he alone can raise the dead, who first gave life to the living; but then we may imitate his goodness, meekness and mercy; and he commands us, *Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me*; what? "Not to frame the world, nor to create both visible and invisible things, says St. Austin, nor even to work miracles in the world; but *learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart*, Matth. xi. 29." This he lays upon us as a strict obligation, as an indispensable duty; and the apostle recommends the observance of it to his converts almost in every chapter, as a thing of the highest concern, nay, as necessary to salvation.

From this subject the apostle passes to another, not less important, and cautions the Ephesians against avarice, which he styles a species of idolatry, and against all impurity, whether in word or action: but *fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you: neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting.* And he adds the reason; because such crimes have no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God,

God. Such a menace alone should be sufficient to deter Christians (who believe a future state of bliss and misery) from falling into these things. For certainly it is madness, for a sum of money to sell heaven, and to purchase hell for a brutish and fleeting pleasure. I cannot tell what effect these words, addressed to the Ephesians, wrought upon them; but it is sure the Christians of our age, who hear and read them, nay, and pretend to believe them, seem unconcerned: they go on in spite of menace; they run into all manner of uncleanness, nay, and boast of those impurities the very Pagans were ashamed of.

This vice, above all others, has a dangerous circumstance, that it is not safe even to arraign it; other disorders may be attack'd in publick; their malice may be produced, and all the bad consequences laid open; but the apostle forbids Christians to name this monster; *Let it not be named among you*; the very sound of it spreads infection, and it is almost unsecure for a preacher to recommend a remedy.

However, without touching the vice, I will only glance at three effects, capable to make impressions upon those, who have not flung up all right to heaven.

First, As chastity equals us to angels, impurity lays us on the same level with beasts; we are without reason, so soon as we lose modesty. Thus when the two judges framed a criminal design against the chaste Susanna, the scripture tells us, that the violence of their passion overturned their reason; nay, they were so brutalized with the sensual transport, as to have no regard for their honour, conscience, or heaven it self, *to which they refused to lift up their eyes*, Hist. of Sus. Solomon's wisdom was the admiration of his age, so long

long as he was chaste; but when he gave himself over to sensuality, his folly was no less famous; for when he began to adore idols of flesh, he turned a worshipper of stocks and stones: hence a Pagan pronounced wisdom incompatible with love. "It is not even allowed the Gods to love and to be wise at the same time." And besides the natural causes of this stupidity, there is another more immediate; the just judgment of God, who, as St. Paul says, abandons the luxurious to the inordinate desires of their heart, and gives them over to the disorders of a blind passion, that hurries them to actions not only unbecoming a Christian, but a man.

Hence it comes, that such people are insensible to good counsel, and proof to admonition; they will curse indeed their follies, but cannot make one resolution to grow wiser; they see their mistake, but cannot find in their hearts to correct it: so that they seem to be delivered over to a reprobate sense, and to be mark'd out for damnation. For this sin, by custom, sits as close to us almost as our nature, and so blinds the understanding, so hardens our will, that all the motives to repentance prove ineffectual. They perceive not that it weakens their health, till they are over-run with diseases; that they endanger their estates, till they have spent all; that they risque heaven, till they groan in hell.

Secondly, This pernicious sin not only extinguishes the light of reason, but of faith also. First, it leads into an indifference for religion; and then (when a man is deeply engaged) into infidelity. How many debauchees say, Fornication is no sin? a weakness of nature? a mere necessity? Yet St. Paul is positive, that those, who are guilty of it, shall have *no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ*, Eph,

Eph. v. 5. and that by consequence it is a mortal sin ; for nothing less excludes from heaven. Now to deny a practical truth revealed in scripture, is as much heresy as to deny a speculative one ; and he as truly apostatizes from Christ, who disbelieves his word, as he who disbelieves his Divinity.

From the denial of a practical truth, there is but a short passage to that of a speculative one: they are both equally sins against faith, and one plains the way for the other. To men, flush'd in impurities, the flames of hell suggest a melancholy and ungrateful *memento* ; they therefore first spring doubts, and then go on to a flat denial. How can God, say they, whose mercy is over all his works, punish eternally for a pleasure that does him no harm, and gives the creature satisfaction ? Thus the corruption of the heart infects the understanding, and the consciousness that they deserve hell persuades them there is no such place. In fine, lasciviousness weans from all sense, not only of revealed religion, but of natural also, and so leaves a man unprovided of all motives of repentance ; and who can think a man will ever repent, who supposes he has no reason to repent ?

The apostle not only dissuades the Ephesians from unclean actions, but also from words that grate upon chaste ears, and savour of impurity. *Let not, says he, filthiness nor foolish talking be once named among you,* Eph. v. 3. for words are sinful as well as actions, and sometimes more so. Men, in spite of debauchery, have so much of nature left, or at least of breeding, as to confine their lewdness to darkness and obscurity ; but for words they have no such reserve ; they vent them freely in company, and oftentimes fling them into a drooping conversation to give it spirit and life ;
and

and so they always have an additional malice of scandal; that is, they endanger a neighbour's virtue, and tempt his innocence, and too often murder it.

Such immodesty has so much of the beast, that one would think men should blush to talk so, as the most libidinous animals would scarce outdo them, had they the faculty of speaking. Nay, it has so much of ill breeding, that the same moment we trespass upon the laws of God and nature, we transgress the very rules of civility, and so we become at once sinners before God, and clowns in the esteem of men: and yet this unmannerly vice is so customary, that it is almost unsafe for modest women to travel in publick coaches, or boats: from morning to night you hear nothing but the talk of the stews, and the language of the brothel. So that the sense of hearing becomes pain and penance to those, who have not taken leave of all modesty, nor cast away all regard even to civility. I know, the very fulsome-ness of this sin should be a sufficient caution against it; but I desire, moreover, the guilty to take notice, that St. Paul threatens damnation in the next world, and a severe punishment in this. *For because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience,* Ephes. v. 6.

Besides, the apostle forbids scurrilities: *Let not jesting be named among you.* It is express'd in Greek by a word that signifies a facetious civility, and by Aristotle, St. Austin, and St. Thomas, is plac'd among the moral virtues. When it is kept within the bounds of decency and moderation, and unbends the mind with jests, innocent in themselves, and suitable to place, time, and persons, it is call'd urbanity; but when it breaks out into indecencies and jests, with outregard to place, time, and persons, it then degenerates into vice, and is termed scurrility; and

and its malice varies according to the variety of the subject.

Sometimes we jest upon our neighbour's natural defects, and make ourselves merry either with his shape, features, or wit; but such jests are barbarous in good earnest: we are all the work of the Almighty's hand; he distributes beauty and deformity as he pleases; so that the comely have no reason to boast, nor the most disproportion'd to blush: we had no right to be, much less to be beautiful or witty. Complexion, feature, and stature, come not within the reach of merit; they are free-gifts of God, and therefore he that is the best provided of natural perfections, deserves no praise, and he who is the worst, no blame; *For he it is that hath made us, and not we ourselves.*

Tho', therefore, the jest be levelled at our neighbour, it rebounds upon the Creator, it mocks the Architect, and burlesques the creation. And thus at the same time you sport upon the creature, and laugh at the Creator; and render yourself guilty of blasphemy, as well as of scurrility.

If you are furnish'd with more talents than your neighbour, remember you must employ them according to the intention of the donor: and surely he never intended his gifts should be made use of to worry, but to be helpful to one another: those therefore, who have more wit, must not look down with scorn and contempt on those, who have less; but they are as much obliged to rescue them with their counsel from those inconveniences, into which their weakness may lead them, as they are to relieve with their purse the indigent and necessitous. And if they employ their beauty to ensnare a neighbour, at the day of judgment they will wish God had provided them with less, or that they had husbanded it to better purposes.

Some

Some make a jest of their neighbours moral faults, and spend a drolling humour upon their mis-carriages: if their sins are secret; here is defamation joined to scurrility; if publick, an offence, at least, against charity, tho' not against justice. But if one be guilty of a breach of this duty towards God, why must his misfortune be made a jest of, or turned into ridicule? Do we jest on a poor creature, who has broke a limb, or by oversight, or for want of due care, has embezelled an estate? Nature tells us, such chances call rather for compassion than insult, for tears than laughter: but certainly sin is a greater evil than the loss of a limb or an estate; it deprives the sinner of grace, cuts off his title to heaven, and exposes him to all the torments of hell: if a less evil be the object of pity, why must a greater be the subject of mirth? Our blessed Saviour, I am sure, taught us another lesson; he wept, nay, and bled, to reconcile us to his heavenly Father. If therefore the eternal Wisdom laid down his life, to rescue mankind from sin, must not those, who insult over a neighbour, fallen into this unfortunate state, have forfeited all humanity, and taken leave of Christianity also?

Others have such an inclination to scurrility, that they cannot forbear, tho' the jest cost them sacrilege. These are men, who quote scripture, like shreds of plays, to set off a jest, and express their impertinent conceits in the language of heaven. They join the most holy things to the most prophane, the most solemn to the most trivial, and swallow sacrilege without pain, to enliven conversation.

What is more sacred in this world, than the scripture? It is the oracle of heaven, the dictate of the Holy Ghost; it is the authentick covenant between God and men; it contains God's promises to us, and our obligations to him. It tells us what

we

we must believe, and points out what we must do; in fine, it is the authentick instrument of our right to heaven, as also our guide and conductor thither. Are the contents of a book, so holy, a fit ingredient to heighten jollity? to give an agreeable turn, a pleasant air to sarcasms? Would a subject dare to trifle with a royal proclamation, an act of parliament, after so wanton and publick a manner? Why such deference in one case, and none in the other? Do we owe more respect to a prince, or to the great council of the nation, than to God? or can their decrees be of higher concern than the bible? or do we fear from them a more severe chastisement than from our Maker? God is certainly above kings, and his injunctions more binding and valuable than those of the chief magistrate, nor will he bear the abuse with less resentment. He struck Uzza with a sudden death, for touching the ark, in which the covenant was contain'd, with a slight irreverence, and many thousand Bethshemites for looking on with curiosity. Had they prophaned it with raillery, and quoted texts to raise laughter, and carry on a merry debauch, how severely would he have handled them? Has he more regard for the old law, than for the new? for the pentateuch, than the gospel? I believe not. If therefore he suspends his revenge for a time, it will at length fall heavy upon our jesters, and tho' he spares them in this life, it is to torment them eternally in the other.

Turn not, therefore, this book of life into an instrument of death by ill usage. Read it for instruction, not for diversion; to raise compunction, not laughter. By this you must be judged, and receive a reward, if you have complied with its precepts; and, if you have transgressed them, punishment.

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Suffer not yourselves to be seduced by vain and empty words. If companions tell you, there is no harm, believe them not: the apostle is of another opinion; and, without revelation, the very light of nature will inform you, that the word of God must not be prostituted to diversion.

Walk as children of light. God has enlightned you with his holy faith; you know what you are to believe, what you are to do; square therefore your faith by his revelations, and your actions by his commands; and then you will live in his favour, and die to enter into his glory.

GOSPEL of St. Luke, Chap. xi. Verse

14. *And he was casting out a devil, and it was dumb, and it came to pass, when the devil was gone out, the dumb spake: and the people wondered.*

15. *But some of them said, He casteth out devils through Beelzebub, the chief of the devils.*

16. *And others tempting him, sought of him a sign from heaven.*

17. *But he knowing their thoughts, said unto them, Every kingdom divided against it self, is brought to desolation: and a house divided against a house, falleth.*

18. *If Satan also be divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand? because ye say that I cast out devils through Beelzebub.*

19. *And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your sons cast them out? therefore shall they be your judges.*

20. *But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you.*

21. *When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace.*

22. *But*

22. *But when a stronger than he shall come upon him and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils.*

23. *He that is not with me, is against me; and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth.*

24. *When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest: and finding none, he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out.*

25. *And when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished.*

26. *Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in, and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first.*

THE MORAL REFLECTION.

THIS passage of St. Luke's gospel shews to what extremes prejudice and passion hurried the scribes and pharisees, and with what patience our blessed Saviour heard their calumnies, with what meekness he bore them, and with what sweetness he endeavoured to reclaim them. They were present at his instructions, not to learn, but to carp; to find faults in his doctrine, not to embrace it: they called for miracles, *they desired a sign*; yet when Christ condescended so far as to satisfy their curiosity, and confound their malice, they covered their obstinacy with weak exceptions, that rather shewed they would not be convinced of his divinity, than that they were not: sometimes they flatly denied the miracles he wrought in the face of the multitude; then they quarrel'd with the circumstances; *he must not heal on the sabbath day*. And when their infidelity could find no other expedient to evade the force of evidence, they ascribed his miracles to magic. *He*

casteth out devils through Beelzebub the prince of the devils. You cast out one devil by the assistance of another.

It is certain, this was a provoking calumny, and rather called for vengeance than a confutation. However, our Saviour, who came to save this stiff-necked generation, not to punish it, stifled all resentments, contenting himself to reason them out of their error, rather than chastise their impudence. *If Satan be divided against himself, that is, act against his own interest, how can his kingdom stand?* But if I cast out devils, not by magick, *but a divine power*, then you must acknowledge I am the Messias so long promised, and so impatiently expected by you.

This conduct of our Saviour teaches the faithful, that it is not against the perfection of the most severe virtue to wipe off a calumny; but then it must be done with charity and moderation, to right ourselves, and not wrong our enemy. Tho' he lays false crimes to our charge, we must not charge him with true ones, if secret, without extreme necessity. For tho' we prove him guilty, it is no good proof of our own innocence; nor do we recover our own good name by impairing his. Harsh language may heighten his passion, but it seldom brings him to a true sense of his sin; and too much concern for an aspersion (at least in the opinion of the vulgar) argues some guilt, and more pride.

The infidels of Alexandria press'd a holy Christian for a miracle in proof of Christ's divinity: *Can you desire a greater* (replied he) *than to see me suffer with patience, for his sake, all these torments, your rage and fury inflicts upon me?* In like manner, when the wicked censure your most innocent actions, when they put false constructions and uncharitable glosses upon your conduct; when they

they traduce your zeal for an unquiet passion, and condemn the modesty of your behaviour of dissimulation; how can you more clearly weaken the accusation and demonstrate your innocence, than by bearing the aspersions with patience, and shewing no concern but for the sin of your accuser? No men living are generally more vain and proud than those, who, out of a principle of interest, or hypocrisy, endeavour to conceal their vices under the mask of humility: but when their honour is engaged, when their reputation is in danger, they break through the disguise with noise and tumult, and expose the imposture. But when a man is neither moved by praise or reproach to any unbecoming word or action, when he forfeits his honour to save his conscience, and practises patience in spite of provocation; it is an evident sign he lays to heart Christ's interest, not his own; that motives of eternity influence his actions and regulate his behaviour. "It is very elegantly written in a certain book of scripture, saith St. Jerome, *Do not run after glory, and you will never grieve at disappointments.* But who of us all can with composure see his good name torn to pieces by the calumnies of men, and rejoice in the Lord. Whoever pursues vain-glory, and the empty applauses of men, can never accomplish this.

Go on therefore in the exercise of christian virtues, tho' malice traduces them, and envy you: this was our Saviour's practice. He ceased not to instruct the people, tho' he met with censure; nor to cure the blind and lame, because the priests and elders declared him a magician. No; he would never omit a good action, out of an apprehension of being misrepresented; nor ceased to labour for his Father's honour, lest he should forfeit his own. We must therefore follow his footsteps, and neither be

frighted from our duty by reproaches, nor drawn from it by censure. If the wicked *call the master of the family Beelzebub, what wonder they treat his domesticks with the same liberty?*

But if it be our duty to bear others aspersions with patience, or to confute them with modesty, it is much more so not to blacken their virtues, nor to question their piety by sly innuendo's or malicious comments. For this is a sin of no ordinary size; nay, if we believe St. Austin, it is downright against the Holy Ghost. *He sins against the Holy Ghost, who misinterprets those actions that are done by the inspiration and assistance of the Holy Ghost.* Now it is plain, all virtues are such, and our Saviour assures us, that such crimes are so enormous, that they shall neither be pardoned in this life, nor in the other. This is a terrible menace, and ought to cure that censuring humour that reigns so universally in the world. But the most effectual means to root out this pharisaical vice, is to remove the cause. If we walk sincerely with God, and intend his glory in all our actions, we shall not put an ill construction upon our neighbour. No people are more apt to condemn others of hypocrisy, than those that play the hypocrite themselves. They make their conduct the rule of other mens, and suppose the motive of all their actions is no better than their own. Practise therefore virtue your self, and you will not suspect your brethren; and if you will bear him no ill will, you will not easily blame his behaviour.

The malice of the devil is so inveterate against man, and at the same time so restless, that tho' by the power of God, and the means of a true repentance, he be cast out of our souls, yet he meditates a speedy return, and sets a thousand engines at work to procure, either by force or surprize, an entrance;

entrance: *I will return unto my house, whence I came out* : he calls to his assistance *seven other spirits more wicked than himself* ; and when they have gained admission, *they enter in, and dwell there* ; and by consequence *the last state of that man is worse than the first*. This is an emblem of those persons state, who, after a serious repentance, re-plunge into their former disorders : the devil truly returns into their souls, and what is worse, *to dwell there* ; and to compleat the misfortune, he is accompanied by a train of vices ; for it is rare to see a man, for a considerable time, wedded to one mortal sin, without being guilty of others.

Now, that he is in a more deplorable state than he was the first time he fell, is no less easy to be proved from reason, than the positive testimony of our blessed Saviour.

First, The circumstance of a relapse aggravates the sin : a crime, often pardoned, becomes by the frequency more unpardonable. What punishment deserves the traitor, who, after a gracious pardon for the first treason, relapses immediately into a second ? This is not look'd upon as a simple treason, but a complication of treason, ingratitude, and perfidiousness ; of treason, because he rebels against his prince ; of ingratitude, because he abuses the favour in prejudice of his very benefactor ; of perfidiousness, because he breaks his word, and returns treachery in place of amendment.

Every mortal sin is downright treason, not against a man, equal in nature with the offender, tho' superior in dignity ; but against God, infinite in all perfections : when he pardons a sin, he clears us of treason ; he gives us (not our lives) but our souls, which we forfeit by every mortal crime, together with our title to grace, and what is worse, to heaven : nay, we give his justice right to punish us with

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whips and scorpions in this life, and with eternal flames in the next. Are we not therefore ungrateful to excess, when we return to our sins, and provoke that goodness that has saved us, and presume on that mercy that can damn us: for presumption attends this conduct; and it is a kind of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, as well as despair; for if this diffides in God's mercy, the other abuses it.

When you confessed your first sin, you not only detested the crime, but protested in the presence of God all fidelity to his commands for the future; on these conditions he pardoned the offence; without this promise there is no true sorrow, without sorrow no repentance, and no pardon without this. Now when you relapse, do you not forget your most solemn protestations? do you not break your word? nay, at the approach of a feeble temptation, and this only to please either a shameless creature, or a shameful passion; and can there be a greater perfidiousness? We blush even to be accused of a breach of fidelity to men, yet are not ashamed to be really guilty of treachery to God.

Secondly, Few men are wedded long to one sin, but at length they fall in love with others: it is ten to one that the miser, who passionately dotes on his own money, as eagerly covets his neighbour's; and then nothing hinders him from forfeiting his honesty, but the want of an occasion. He who affects an eminent station in the world, seldom stops at a mere desire; he pushes forwards, and, if he cannot advance by lawful means, he lays hands on those that are unlawful.

Thirdly, Repeated acts pass into custom, custom into nature, and nature into necessity. It is true, God never abandons a sinner so far as to leave him without all assistance, so that no ill habit puts him in an impossibility of repenting; however, it en-
creases

creases the difficulty beyond expression, and tho' with an ordinary grace, perhaps, he has the power to rise, he will not have the will. Now a bare capacity of repentance will never justify him; for a mere power to detest our past disorders, is no real detestation of them. Seeing therefore a relapse adds to sin so many circumstantial aggravations, and is accompanied by such a crowd of dangerous consequences, I may conclude with our blessed Saviour, *That the last state of that man is worse than the first.*

Oh my God, enter not into judgment with thy poor and sinful servant; *For, in thy sight shall no man living be justified,* Psal. cxliiii. 2, much less I, who have returned perfidiousness for so many pardons, and ingratitude for a thousand favours. I renew at present my former protestations of an eternal obedience to thy commands, and methinks the horror of my past transgressions promises more fidelity for the future.

EPISTLE to the Galatians, Chap. iv. Verse

22. *For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bond-maid, the other by a free-woman.*

23. *But he who was of the bond-woman, was born after the flesh: but he of the free-woman was by promise.*

24. *Which things are an allegory; for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai; which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar.*

25. *For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children.*

26. *But*

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26. *But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.*

27. *For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren, that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband.*

28. *Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise.*

29. *But as then he that was born after the flesh, persecuted him that was born after the Spirit: even so it is now.*

30. *Nevertheless, what saith the scripture? Cast out the bond-woman and her son: for the son of the bond-woman shall not be heir with the son of the free-woman.*

31. *So then, brethren, we are not children of the bond-woman, but of the free.*

The MORAL REFLECTION:

THE Galatians received the gospel with joy by the preaching of St. Paul; but, in his absence, some Jewish converts raised divisions in the church, and withdrew them from the true doctrine of the apostle, to engage them in errors: *You did run well: who did hinder you, that ye should not obey the truth?* Gal. v. 7. These preachers pretended, that the converted Gentiles were subject to all the precepts and ceremonies of the Mosaic law, and wheedled many into this erroneous persuasion.

St. Paul addresses this epistle to the Galatians, to disabuse them; he threatens hell and damnation to the seducers: *He that troubleth you, shall bear his judgment, whosoever he be,* chap. v. ver. 10. and God's disfavour to those who suffered themselves to be misled; *Ye are fallen from grace.*

He

He tells them, that the religion of Christ will not save them, if they permit themselves to be circumcised; *If ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing*, chap. v. ver. 2. He sticks not to accuse them of madness and folly, for casting themselves into a servitude without necessity, nay against their interest; from which our Saviour redeem'd them at the expence of his blood, having rescued them from the quality of slaves, to the dignity of adoptive children. In fine, to convince the Galatians more fully of the unlawfulness of circumcision in the new law, he compares the two Testaments; the old to Hagar, a bond-woman, the other to Sarah, a free-woman; and the children of the first (the Jews) to slaves; of the second to free-born children; and then concludes, seeing Christians are the off-spring of Sarah the free-woman, they are exempt from the observance of the Mosaic ceremonies, only instituted for the Jews, who, being figured by Hagar, a slave, are obliged, like her, to live in bondage and slavery.

This is the literal meaning of the passage before us; but, to propose a Moral, I will take some particular part of it into consideration; *But Jerusalem, which is above, is free, which is the mother of us all.*

First, Jerusalem signifies vision of peace; and St. Paul gives the church that name, to teach us, that God has a peculiar providence over the whole in general, and each particular member, and procures them tranquillity and peace; but *not such an one as the world gives*, which is nothing but an insensibility ten times more dangerous than an open war: it is an indifference for all things which regard the other world; a drowsiness in the practice of Christian duties, that so stupifies the soul, that the

she has but a faint wishing to do well, and scarce perceives when she does ill, and therefore contents herself to cry out *Peace, peace*, when she is within an ace of being defeated by her enemies.

The peace, here signified, is the legacy Christ left his apostles, and all the faithful, till the world's end: and this peace, as the apostle explains himself in another place, *is a pure conscience before God*, together with a peaceable behaviour to men; this is that peace Christ brought into the world, and sealed with his blood; he invites all men to enter into the treaty, and furnishes them with means to compass it; and certainly, no other real peace is to be found in this world: let a man enjoy the wealth and wisdom of Solomon, and all the pleasures, power and money are able to procure, or sense feel; if conscience be in disorder, if it upbraids us with guilt, and raises our crimes against us, all wordly satisfactions will taste insipid, and make an ungrateful impression upon the organ: Music, says the wise man, is so far from pleasing a man in sorrow, that it rather grates upon, than pleases the ear: the most exquisite dainties have not attractives for the most refin'd Epicure under a fit of the gout or stone; much less for a criminal on the rack; and yet these pains are nothing to that of a tortur'd conscience, because the consequences are not so dismal.

As therefore, in the apostle's allegory, we are the sons of Jerusalem, *i. e.* of peace, let us make good the appellation by our conduct; let us purge by tears whatever may displease God; and by a Christian demeanor take care to give no just offence to our neighbour, and we shall be truly sons of peace, and enjoy a blessing, which no body can steal from us without our free consent: *John xvi. 22.*

Secondly,

Secondly, Our Church is from above, because Christ the head of it, true God and true man, came down from heaven to plant it upon earth by his labour, and to water it with his sweat, and to cement and knit its part together with his most precious blood; he taught us what we must do by his example and precepts, and what we must believe by the discovery of those truths he was pleased to reveal. God gave the old law on Sinai by proxy; he sent an angel, as his delegate, to promulge it; but he published the new in person; he preached it himself, and then sealed it with his blood.

Seeing therefore Christ has taken so much pains to establish his Church, certainly those are in a great mistake, who put all religions upon the same level, and pretend they are but different ways to heaven. Were it true that our Saviour gave men such unbounded liberty, why did he reveal mysterious objects of our belief? why did he enact laws for rules of our practice, and threaten damnation to delinquents? Could he reveal truths without obliging us to believe them? or enact laws without demanding obedience? for, acknowledging him to be God, we must believe he speaks truth, and therefore must believe the mystery, tho' reason be not able to comprehend it; and, upon the same score, must obey, when he commands, or suffer for our transgression.

St. Paul protests to the Galatians, that the profession of the Christian religion will avail them nothing, if they suffer themselves to be circumcised; and he declares all those guilty of a damnable sin, who had undergone the operation, *Ye are fallen from grace*; and yet these converts sin'd not in believing too little, but too much: they embrac'd the whole law Christ had established; but then they

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they adhered to that he had abolished. Leave then, dear reader, these latitudinarian principles to those, who have a mind to try experiments upon a cast, on which depends an eternity : we must not go to heaven as we please, but as Christ has ordain'd : he is *the Way* ; we must follow his example, and execute his commands ; he is *the Truth*, we must believe him : man may err, passion may blind us, prejudice byass us, and even sense deceive us ; but he cannot be mistaken. In fine, he is *the Life* ; he enlivens us here with his grace ; and will, if we believe his words and obey his commands, with his glory hereafter.

Moreover, the church is said to be *above*, because its perfection consists not in worldly goods, as the synagogue's, but heavenly and supernatural ; its promises are not confined to the possession of a *Land flowing with milk and honey*, nor to an abundance of *oil and corn*, but are extended to a more noble object, the clear vision of God in heaven ; to this it raises our thoughts, whets our desires, animates our endeavours, and withdraws our pretensions from those enjoyments that are shorter than eternity, and less than the fruition of our Creator himself.

And the very means to arrive at this land of promise are divine, a strong *faith*, a firm *hope*, and a seraphic *love* ; acts, that fly above all created things, to settle on God : these are the wings, that raise us above the sun and moon, the bands that unite us to God here, to be transformed almost into him hereafter. To this Jerusalem, O Christians, we travel, not to that of Canaan ; of this we are citizens ; *the world is not our habitation*, but a passage ; and therefore we must not amuse our selves with those objects we meet on the road, but view them at a distance, without interrupting our journey.

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It is *free*, not, as some have pretended, from the bondage of precepts, and the obligation of the decalogue: this is certainly to mistake St. Paul, and stretch our liberty beyond the bounds right reason and Christianity prescribe us. Christ died to free us from sin, not to encourage us to commit it; to crush the empire of Satan, not to establish it. If Christ has repealed the decalogue by his passion, we have liberty to transgress it without fear of an after-reckoning, because without offence. And thus, instead of bringing peace, union, and sanctity into the world, he has brought vice, disorder, and confusion.

Tho' therefore St. Paul says we are *free*, it is not upon such a wild notion of liberty; he only means a spiritual freedom, that springs from perfect charity; by which we serve God, not out of a motive of fear, but of a filial and reverential love; not by a crowd of ceremonies, but *in spirit and truth*. We are free from the tyranny, tho' not the assaults of passion. These God permits, to polish our virtue, to prove our fidelity, and to give lustre to our crown. But then he supplies us with force to repel their fury: so that we can't be overcome, unless we will: our defect must proceed from choice, not necessity; from want of courage to fight, not of power to conquer. Passions may revolt; the devil may tempt, the flesh rebel; but, as St. Austin remarks, they are able only to hurt those that are willing.

In this consists Christian liberty; this we enjoy, not by our merits, but Christ's goodness. And to pretend to a greater, is to exceed our condition, and our Saviour's intention, to whose liberality we totally stand indebted for the favour. It is our duty to return gratitude for the benefit, and not to relapse into actual offences, out of a persuasion

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sion we are lawless. We are exempt from the law of Moses, not from his, and *whosoever offends in one point, is guilty of all*, James ii. 10.

Let us thank our Redeemer for having broke the chains of sin that fettered us; and shew, we are sensible of our liberty, by employing it in his service, and to his honour that gave it. And indeed, what freedom is comparable to the service of God? To command empires in sin, is only to reign over men, and to groan under the bondage of the devil; but to obey God's commands, and to practise humility and patience, is to reign indeed.

GOSPEL of St. John, Chap. vi. Verse

1. *After these things, Jesus went over the sea of Galilee, which is the sea of Tiberias.*

2. *And a great multitude followed him, because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased.*

3. *And Jesus went up into a mountain, and there he sat with his disciples.*

4. *And the passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh.*

5. *When Jesus then lift up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat?*

6. *(And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do.)*

7. *Philip answered him, Two hundred penny worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little.*

8. *One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, saith unto him,*

9. *There*

9. *There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes : but what are they among so many?*

10. *And Jesus said, Make the men sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand.*

11. *And Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes, as much as they would.*

12. *When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.*

13. *Therefore they gathered them together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten.*

14. *Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world.*

15. *When Jesus therefore perceived, that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone.*

THE MORAL REFLECTION.

JESUS pass'd over the sea of Galilee, which is that of Tiberias, and a great multitude followed him. St. Matthew tells us, these people were so greedy of our Saviour's instructions, that they flocked to him from far and near, and waited upon him in the wilderness three days; *I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat. And I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way, chap. v. ver. 32.*

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This confluence of people that press'd upon our blessed Saviour, to learn his divine precepts, in all probability was made up of peasants, that dwelt in the neighbouring villages and adjoining hamlets; we find no persons of note and authority, that applied themselves to him for instructions, except Nicodemus, and the rich young man: yet the one came in private; and the other, affrighted with the severity of his doctrine, soon withdrew, and abandoned him. This is an instance, that the state of the rich is not so happy, nor that of the clown so miserable, as people fancy. If we weigh things in an equal ballance, we shall find that those deserve not envy, and that these have no reason to complain. For God seems in a special manner to have created heaven for the poor, and earth for the rich. Poor shepherds first welcomed our Saviour into the world, and adored him; a poor carpenter entertained him; poor fishermen followed him into the garden; and poor women to the cross. In fine, he has pronounced the poor happy, *Blessed be ye poor*, Luke vi. 20. and the rich unfortunate, *Woe unto you that are rich*, ver. 24. And he declares the reason; because their salvation is next to an impossibility; *It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven*, Matth. xix. 24. In the parable of the marriage, he has express'd this truth at length, and in plain terms. The prince invited to the feast, men of consideration and figure; and when they desired to be excused upon vain pretences of business, he ordered his servants to force the poor, blind, and lame, to fill up his table. I do not mean by the poor, those that live in extreme necessity; want is no less dangerous to salvation than abundance: it puts people upon strange practices,

practices, and therefore the wise man prayed to God with no less earnestness to defend him from poverty, than riches; *Give me neither poverty nor riches*, Prov. xxx. viii. Let me neither want, nor abound; but give me what is sufficient for me to live, and too little to riot withal.

And certainly, tho' all men meet with strong enemies in their way to heaven, yet those of a higher rank find the greatest opposition: flesh and blood are prone to rebellion, tho' tamed with abstinence, and work'd down with labour; but then they are ten times more mutinous and disobedient, when pampered with ease, and fed high with delicacies. The objects, that present themselves to the eyes of the vulgar, are either innocent or indifferent, and if they invite them not to virtue, they provoke them not to vice: but the rich are encompassed with snares; prophane company debauches them into bad principles, and ill examples into worse practices; unlawful designs employ their heads; lewd amours infect their hearts; and, which is the greatest temptation, they can lose their innocence without forfeiting their reputation, and support at the same time the dignity of their station, and the expences of their lusts.

I must therefore pronounce those more happy, whose state condemns them to toil and hard labour, than those, whose station permits them to play and riot; for, as heaven is the place of our supreme felicity in the next world, to be placed in the way, that leads most directly to it, is one of the greatest favours God can bestow upon us in this: now it is certain from reason, experience, and scripture it self, that people of a lower class are in a more safe way. What then remains, but that they thank Providence for having provided them with what is necessary to live, and

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refused what might incite them to live ill: tho' they make no figure in this world, they will in the next; where a virtuous clown will find a reward, and a vicious emperor punishment. The poverty and sores of a miserable Lazarus, supported with patience, conveyed him into Abraham's bosom; and the wealth of a luxurious rich man, spent in feasting, plunged him into hell.

The evangelist tells us, those people were so eager to learn the true way to heaven, so intent upon the great affair of their salvation, that they laid aside all thoughts of their temporal concerns, to attend their eternal; they took no provisions with them, yet ventured into a wilderness, where they were sure to find none; however, they relied upon providence, and considered that our Saviour, who nourished their souls with so much charity, would extend his care to their bodies: nor did they fall short of their expectation; for he wrought a miracle to feed them, and so has left posterity a convincing instance, that those, who seek God in the first place, will find all necessities to live; and so, tho' they hazard all things, they lose nothing.

There is no point of our religion less understood, even by those who pretend to piety, than this; yet none is more necessary in practice. Our Saviour commands us to be solicitous in the concerns of our soul, and he protests he will take care we want not necessities for the sustenance of our bodies; he bids us bend all our thoughts to the purchase of heaven, and assures us we shall suffer no prejudice in our fortunes; yet, as if we doubted of his power, or questioned his veracity, we fling away all our time upon our temporal concerns, without dreaming of eternity: we suffer the rack by a thousand anxieties that spring from an excessive

cessive fear of losing, or a too vehement hope of gaining: nay, we are not only solicitous *for to-morrow*, which, notwithstanding, is forbid; but extend our forecast, and consequently our torment, to many years, when perchance we are come to the last day of our life.

We should reflect, that God has not placed us in this world (as the ostrich lays her eggs in the desert) and then abandons us: no; he, who called us from nothing to life by his omnipotence, will preserve us by the favour of his bounty: bears and lions, out of a natural instinct, provide for their young ones, and will God, the Author of this very instinct, desert his children? He has redeemed us from the slavery of sin, and consequently from the flames of hell, at the expence of the blood of his dearest Son; and can a Christian, who believes this grand mystery, fancy he will expose our bodies to the extremities of cold and hunger? The worst of men furnish their servants with meat and cloathing, and will the Best of Beings treat his with less charity? no, certainly; we have his word he will not, and the excess of his goodness assures us he cannot.

How comes it then (you will say) that some are poor, and others unprovided of necessaries? The reason is, that the greatest part of these forlorn wretches are as void of virtue as of means, and their souls are more indigent than their bodies; and if it happens, that even those, who serve God, groan under the same misfortune, a slight examination will convince us, that these even labour in the first place for the support of their bodies, and only in the second for the salvation of their souls.

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Now, tho' Christ has promised to supply our wants, it is on condition we *seek first the kingdom of heaven*, Matth. vi. 33. and if we fail in this, he may leave us to our selves, without the breach of fidelity ; for what means, *Seek first the kingdom of heaven?* The sense is clear, and imports that we must serve God, and practise virtue, in spite of all opposition ; that we must look upon this as the principal, and all temporal concerns as mere accessories ; that we must expose our bodies to thirst and hunger, rather than commit an injustice, and expose our lives to save our conscience : without this, Christ is obliged to nothing ; much less if we offend him (which is the case of most.) What reason has he to maintain a life, we almost wholly employ to his dishonour and our own damnation ? But here we must beware of an illusion ; some fanaticks of the last age took the promise so literally, as if Christ discharged them of all care of their families ; they supposed he would supply them with provisions, as he did the Jews with quails and manna in the wilderness ; this is not confidence in God, but downright presumption ; not an argument of virtue, but of pride and folly ; not to follow the scripture, but to abuse it.

Every man must follow his calling, and may endeavour, not only to keep off poverty, but to make a fortune ; Christ forbids us to be solicitous, not to be careful ; and if he condemns too great a concern for things of this world, he never intended to preach up idleness. We may labour for an establishment, without being anxious about the event ; and when we have done our part, we must leave the rest to Providence, neither repining at bad, nor priding our selves in good success ; in fine, we must never fix our thoughts so upon earth,

earth, as to hinder their flight to heaven; here they must lodge, here they must dwell, and rather only touch, than stop at, any worldly concern.

I cast my self, O God, into the arms of thy providence, and submit with pleasure to thy ordinances: I desire neither wealth, nor honours; nor refuse poverty, nor contempt: give me thy grace, to purchase heaven, and I willingly fling up all pretensions to any thing upon earth: I know, if I seek thee sincerely, thy goodness will provide me necessaries; but if thou wilt have me live in indigence, I submit, and will always acknowledge, it is better to want with patience and submission, than to enjoy abundance with pride and intemperance.

EPISTLE to the Hebrews, .Chap. ix. Verse

11. *But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building;*

12. *Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood, he entred in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.*

13. *For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh;*

14. *How much more shall the blood of Christ, who, through the eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?*

15. *And for this cause he is the Mediator of the new Testament, that by means of death, for*
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the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.

THE MORAL REFLECTION.

THE apostle, from the beginning of this epistle to the ninth chapter, shews from the nature of the Aaronical priesthood, and the whole tenor of the old testament, that the law of Moses must yield to that of Christ, and give place to his gospel. He follows the same subject in this chapter, but with a new proof, *viz.* the fabrick of the tabernacle, which was but a shadow and figure of the church established by Christ, the so-longed-for Messias.

He first enters upon an exact description of the tabernacle, and all the vessels destined to divine service: he then informs the Jews, that the annual entrance of the high-priest into the *Sanctum sanctorum*, or *Holy of holies*, with the blood of goats, signified Christ, who, by the effusion of his most precious blood, entered triumphant into heaven, opened the gates of the holy city, shut to all mankind since the disobedience of our first father, and procured not only an abundant, but an eternal redemption for his posterity. And then he concludes, that, if the expiatory sacrifices of the Jews were able to confer a legal and exterior sanctity and purity; with greater reason the blood of Christ has force to cleanse us from all sins, and to plant in our souls all those virtues God requires at our hands, and the new law commands.

I intend not here to entertain you with the excellence of the Christian religion above the Jewish, which seems to be the apostle's drift; but will endeavour to raise you to a confidence in the mercy of
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of God, founded on the merits of our Saviour, and the office of Mediator and Advocate he is pleased to take upon him.

It is true, the guilt of sin is in a manner infinite, because it is an offence against an infinite Being, and consequently it is a debt no creature is able to discharge; nothing but a person equal to God can repair the injury, nothing under *God made man* has a sufficient fund to cancel the debt; but then one drop of his blood is of an infinite value, and therefore a superabundant price for the redemption of a thousand worlds, and capable to satisfy for more sins than all creatures possible are able to commit. Christ took upon him our obligation; he bound himself *for us* to his Father; he became man, that he might suffer for us, but still he remained God, and his satisfaction is infinite, proportioned indeed to the demerit of our sins, but infinitely exceeding them.

Christ has laid down all his sufferings for my ransom; his heavenly Father has accepted the payment; what then can I expect but pardon, if I ask it, and by an unfeigned sorrow plead my Saviour's merits? I know, indeed, my sins are many and great; but my Redeemer's satisfaction is greater. The blood of this just Abel cries out louder for mercy, than that of the first for vengeance: Oh what a subject of consolation is this! what a motive for confidence! Tho' I were charged with all the sins of men and devils, one drop of Christ's blood can atone for them; nay, the least action of his life pleased his heavenly Father more, than the most flaming crimes displease him: tho' therefore our demerits call for justice, Christ's merits plead more persuasively for mercy; and why should we doubt to obtain it of a God, so prone of himself to clemency, when moved besides by so strong motives to goodness?

St. Paul

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St. Paul encourages all Christians to approach the throne of mercy with confidence and assurance, upon this consideration, that God, who has manifested his love to man in such an extraordinary manner, as to *give his Son for our salvation*, can refuse us nothing that tends to this great end; and certainly we have reason to expect from his goodness all the supplies of grace imaginable, if we ask them in Christ's name. Our Saviour reprehends his disciples for having ask'd nothing; he commands them to present their petition to God, and assures them they shall obtain it. *Hitherto have ye ask'd nothing in my name: Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full*, John xvi. 24. So that at once we have our necessity and indigence for a motive to ask; the Father's goodness, the Son's merits, and besides his promise, for caution that we shall obtain our request; and certainly these assurances are sufficient to erect the most dejected minds, to inspirit the most faint-hearted, and to inspire hope into the most desperate: for, in fine, God is most Omnipotent; if I lean upon him, how can I fall? He is Omniscient; under his conduct, can I be misled? He is Goodness; how can he cast me off? He is Faithful; if I put my trust in him, can he forget me? can he neglect me? can he abandon me?

Let us therefore fear nothing more than to fear a repulse: the more we confide in God's goodness, the sooner we shall feel its effects. I know indeed, the enormity of our offences, our baseness, and God's majesty, the multitude of favours we have received, and our returns of ingratitude, are rather subjects of despair than of hope and confidence: but then, if we look upon the cross, and behold the beloved Son of God expiring for our sakes in the midst of most cruel torments, offering up his
blood

blood for the expiation of our sins, and laying down his life to redeem us from death; methinks we may cease, not only to despair, but even to fear: the wounds of Christ will plead harder for pardon, than our crimes for vengeance; and his death will more effectually draw down upon us grace, than our ingratitude punishment. For if the blood of goats could confer an exterior holiness, and wash out a legal offence; with greater reason the blood of Christ will cleanse not only our bodies, but our souls also, of the greatest impieties, and adorn them with christian virtues.

I will therefore retreat into the wounds of my dying Saviour, as into a secure sanctuary; God will suspend his anger at so moving a posture. The torments of his Son will disarm his justice, and turn him into mercy; for, in a word, the humility, the patience, and the other sufferings of my Saviour have satisfied the rigour of justice for my sins: what reason then have I to fear? They have merited grace; what favour may not I hope for? Let my distemper be never so mortal, his blood can cure it; tho' my debts are infinite, I find in his death an equal fund both of satisfaction and merit.

I can therefore demand of God without temerity, without presumption, supernatural graces. Nay, I am sure to receive no denial, if I ask with an humble and sincere confidence in the merits of Christ, because they are mine; for me he was made man; for me he suffered, and at length died on the cross; for me he prayed, before his death, and at it: so that, O my Lord God, not I, but thy beloved son, asks pardon for me; or rather, I with him, and by him; he asks with justice the effects of his passion, which he merited for me out of pure mercy: blot out then, O heavenly Father, my sins; supply me with grace, that I may fall no more; which I
humbly

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humbly beg through Jesus Christ our Lord, who, with thee, and the Holy Ghost, liveth and reigneth, one God, world without end. *Amen.*

GOSPEL of St. John, Chap. viii. Verse

46. *Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?*

47. *He that is of God, heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God.*

48. *Then answered the Jews, and said unto him, Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil?*

49. *Jesus answered, I have not a devil; but I honour my Father, and ye do dishonour me.*

50. *And I seek not mine own glory: there is one that seeketh and judgeth.*

51. *Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death.*

52. *Then said the Jews unto him, Now we know that thou hast a devil: Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and thou sayest, if a man keep my saying, he shall never taste of death.*

53. *Art thou greater than our father Abraham, which is dead? and the Prophets are dead: whom makest thou thyself?*

54. *Jesus answered, If I honour my self, my honour is nothing: it is my Father that honoureth me, of whom ye say, that he is your God:*

55. *Yet ye have not known him; but I know him: and if I should say, I know him not, I shall be a liar like unto you: but I know him, and keep his saying.*

56. *Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.*

57. *Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?*

58. *Jesus*

58. *Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, before Abraham was, I am.*

59. *Then took they up stones to cast at him : but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.*

THE MORAL REFLECTION.

THE time of our Saviour's passion drawing near, he seemed to redouble his zeal, and leaving the villages and desert, preach'd publicly in the temple ; he appeared in the metropolis, and enforced his sermons with miracles, that no body might plead ignorance ; he laid open the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, and the incredulity of the Jews, who refused to receive his doctrine as divine, and himself as the Messias ; then he protests, they are guilty of stubbornness, and that they can find no reasonable pretext to cover their infidelity. *If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin ; but now they have no cloak for their sin,* John xv. 22.

Yet these charitable remonstrances made small impression upon his audience ; some indeed believed in him, more admired him ; but the greater part returned affronts for his zeal, because they could not bear to be put in mind of those sins they had no inclination to repent of. However our Saviour intermitted no point of his function ; he preach'd on, notwithstanding their obstinacy, and laboured for their salvation, at the same time (he knew) they conspired his ruin.

How many profess Christianity, that imitate the peevish obstinacy of the Jews ? They offend God, scandalize their neighbour, and expose their souls to all the curses God has thundered out against sin in this world, and to all the punishments he has prepared

pared for it in the next ; yet they cannot endure to be told of the danger ; they treat their charitable admonishers, as the Jews did our Saviour, with reproach and insult. *Thou hast a devil*, John vii. 20. What patient ever reviled his physician for endeavouring to cure him ? Or what traveller took pet for being put in his right way ? Is the health of our body more valuable than that of our soul ? Or is not sin, if unrepented, as mortal to the one, as a fever not cured to the other ? Does not either innocence, or repentance, lead us to heaven ; and is not sin the broad way to hell ? Why then do Christians receive a less favour with thanks, and a greater with impatience ?

However, seeing our Saviour commands us to reclaim our brother if possible, his ill-nature must not deter us from the discharge of our duty ; nor must we pretend, the precept of brotherly correction only regards the pastors of the church ; for it takes in every individual Christian ; *Go, and tell him his fault, between thee and him alone*, Matth. xviii. 15. But then it must be done with prudence, caution, and tenderness ; otherwise, whilst we pretend to withdraw our brother from sin, we shall fall into sin ourselves, and must repent for having persuaded him to repentance. In the execution of this command, we must follow the rule prescrib'd by our blessed Saviour ; the admonition must be private, lest, while you endeavour to mend his manners, you impair his reputation : besides, publick checks are seldom taken well even from a friend, much less from an indifferent person ; nay, they rather irritate than heal, and are more likely to raise anger, than sorrow.

Your zeal must not out-run discretion, nor break into heat and passion ; too much warmth seems rather to call down fire from heaven to destroy him,
than

than grace to convert him; you must rather pray than command, and conjure him with sweetness to return to his duty, than reprimand him with sourness. Remember, sores must be touched with a soft hand, and that those of the soul are more easily cured with lenitives than causticks.

Tho' charity obliges every one to contribute to the correction of his brother, yet it seldom reaches an inferior, in respect of his superior; for, in all probability, admonitions, that come from such a person, will be more apt to make him worse than better, and the greatest good that can be expected, is that they do no harm.

But a superior lies strictly under this command; and therefore is guilty of the disorders his inferiors commit, if he winks at them, when it is in his power to correct them. Nor is it sufficient to admonish them; they must exert their authority, and (if occasion requires) join punishment to reprehensions. Heli was acquainted with the scandalous behaviour of his children, and condemned it; nay, he endeavoured in some manner to reclaim them, *Why do ye such things? for I hear of your evil dealings by all these people,* 1 Sam. ii. 23, 24. But because he stopt here, and applied no remedy, but a bare rebuke, God punished the childrens crimes with death, and the father's partiality, not only with death, but the forfeiture of the high priesthood. If your pains are fruitless, they will not go without a reward; for God measures his bounty by our charity, not by the success; but if you persuade your brother into a sense of his duty, *you have gained him*; and what a crown God has prepared for such a conquest, may be conjectured by the precious blood Christ laid down for his redemption.

Tho' the Scribes and Pharisees watch'd every motion of our blessed Saviour, pry'd into every action,
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and never failed to misconstrue all his words ; yet he defied them, publickly, to prove him guilty of the least sin ; *Which of you convinceth me of sin ?* He gave the defiance in the face of his enemies, to establish his innocence, and at the same time to convince the world, that he underwent a shameful death upon the cross, not for his own, but for the sins of men ; and that he freely laid down his life, to purchase, not only life, but eternal happiness, for criminals.

But, principally, he would teach his proselytes by his example, as well as by his words, how they must behave themselves when bad Christians attack their reputation by calumnies, and infidels their lives by torments ; their conduct must be blameless, and their behaviour without offence ; so that they may challenge their enemies with a *Which of you convinceth me of sin ?* And when they are conscious of no offence, they must bear up courageously against calumnies, and even death it self, when they cannot avoid it without a sin ; for it is better to die innocent, than live guilty. This doctrine St. Peter preach'd to the first believers ; *If ye be reproach'd for the name of Christ, happy are ye,* 1 Pet. iv. 14. To suffer for a crime is shameful, but for religion and justice glorious ; for, if it is a glory to be a Christian, it can be no infamy to be a good one ; and, if it be honourable to profess Christ, it must be ignominious to deny him : this made the primitive Christians lead such pious lives, and die such glorious deaths ; they lived like saints, and suffered like traitors in appearance ; yet their very persecutors admired their courage, and all Christians venerate their virtue : if we intend to partake of their glory, we must follow their example, *i. e.* return good for evil, deserve praise, and receive reproaches.

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But further; it is not sufficient to walk so uprightly, that our greatest enemies dare not charge us with any real crime; we must live with such circumspection as to give no just ground even for suspicion: this the apostle meant, when he exhorted the faithful to refrain not only from evil, but from the very appearance of it; and St. Bernard delivers the same doctrine; “ Let us take care, “ not only to live virtuously before God, but to “ converse with edification before men; and to “ do nothing that may give occasion to our neighbour to suspect us of irregularity.” Those therefore are in a great error, who think it lawful to herd with debauch’d company, to entertain a commerce too familiar with the sex, out of a pretence that they do no harm, that their conscience is clear before God, whatever interpretation is put upon their actions by men: but this is a mistake; for every Christian is obliged, not only not to offend God, but also not to scandalize his neighbour. Now, is it not a scandal, to put one’s self in those circumstances, in which men are more often guilty than innocent? or can any one pretend that more people do well in bad company than ill? or that more preserve their chastity in too frequent and close conversation with women, than lose it? Tho’ therefore you do no other harm, at least you scandalize your neighbour, and this is harm enough to draw upon you our Saviour’s curse, *Woe to that man, by whom the offence cometh*, Matth. xviii. 7. and certainly no slight fault draws on the offender so severe a punishment.

O God! suffer me not to receive thy favours with ingratitude, much less with outrage: if any sin lies undiscovered in my soul, command my conscience to disclose it, and to upbraid me night and day, till by the assistance of thy grace I have

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asked forgiveness, and thy goodness has pardoned it. I firmly resolve, in thy divine presence, to abstain from what thou dost forbid, and to execute what thou dost command ; and, as thy mercy has given me this resolution, let it also lead me to the execution.

EPISTLE to the Philippians, Chap. ii. Verse

5. *Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus :*

6. *Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God :*

7. *But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men :*

8. *And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.*

9. *Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name :*

10. *That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth ;*

11. *And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

The MORAL REFLECTION.

THE Philippians, tho' born to Christ by baptism, left not the old vices of paganism. When they embraced the new established religion of our Saviour, they forsook not their former weaknesses :

nesses : they were still possess'd with the spirit of ambition and contention, and affected more to rule than obey. The apostle endeavours here to reclaim them from a practice so contrary to their profession : he exhorts them not to contend with one another, but to say and think the same thing. Phil. ii. 2. Then he dissuades them from vain-glory, the cause of discord and disunion, and thus invites them to the exercise of humility, so singularly practised by our Saviour, and so emphatically recommended by him to his proselytes, in the next verse ; *Let nothing be done through strife or vain-glory ; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves,* Phil. ii. 3.

And, to press this virtue upon them with more force and energy, he proposes the example of our Saviour, who, being God equal to his Father, invested himself with human nature, stoop'd to all our infirmities (sin excepted), *taking upon him the form of a servant,* and abased himself so far as to die, nay, even the most infamous and humbling death, that of the cross : *He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.*

Now, this virtue being of no easy purchase, because contrary to our darling passion pride, which is so interwoven with our nature, that it is difficult to shake it off ; (for it lies with us in the very cradle, and accompanies us to the grave) the apostle proposes the glory that followed Christ's humiliation, as a motive to excite the Philippians to the exercise of it, that the hope of a reward might either remove or abate the difficulty of the conquest : *Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and hath given him a name, which is above every name.* And then he conjures them to bear the same affection to humility, mercy and peace,

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that Christ did: *Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.*

The design of the apostle is plainly to animate Christians to the practice of humility, without which they cannot comply with the duties of Christianity, and consequently cannot be saved: for who is saved unless he resemble Jesus Christ? and who can be like him without humility? He stooped to the baseness of our nature, not in its primitive state of innocence, but of sin; and tho' his humanity was without spot or stain, it had the appearance of a criminal; it was subject to our infirmities, the penalty of rebellion, without deserving them; and suffer'd for our offences, not its own. He was born of a poor mother, led a poor and despicable life, and ended it on an ignominious scaffold; so that his whole life was a continual series of humiliations; and it is hard to determine whether his entrance into the world, or his exit was more humble: so that the holy Fathers seem to place the whole perfection of a Christian in the practice of this virtue alone. * The perfection of Christian wisdom consists neither in discoursing nor disputing well, but in a sincere humility, which Christ, from his birth in a stable to his death on the cross, practised with all courage, and preached with all earnestness.

And indeed, what wonder the holy doctors draw so advantageous a character of humility, see-

** Quæ via ad obtinendam veritatem, quidve primum sit in religione & disciplinâ Christi? respondēbo, primum est humilitas, & quoties interrogabis, toties hoc dicam. S. Aug.*

Tota Christianæ sapientiæ disciplina, non in abundantia verbi, non in astutiâ disputandi, neque in appetitu laudis & gloriæ, sed in verâ & voluntariâ humilitate consistit; quam Dominus Jesus ab utero matris usque ad supplicium crucis omni fortitudine elegit & docuit. S. Leo.

ing our blessed Saviour himself protests, that, *except we become as little children, we shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven?* Matth. xviii. 3. He spoke to the apostles, who valued themselves upon being received into his service ; but he threatened them with damnation, unless they laid aside that vain complacency, and kept themselves in humility, because their vanity would swell into pride, and this ungovernable passion would have pushed them into a hundred disorders.

In short, virtue alone opens heaven-gates ; without this there is no admittance, and without humility there is no virtue. This is the foundation and the measure of all Christian perfection, and, in St. Austin's phrase, the whole fabrick of spirituality rests upon it ; and the higher you raise it, the sooner it will fall, if humility, that supports it, sink not deep, in proportion to the elevation.

Now, if you ask me the nature of humility, I answer ; *It is a virtue, that bridles the inordinate desire of honour and esteem, and that prompts us to covet contempt, because we deserve it.* It has three degrees ; but the last is the most perfect, and properly deserves the name of humility.

The first moves us to subject ourselves to all the commandments, that oblige under mortal sin ; so that we would not transgress one, tho' the whole world were proposed for the recompence of our disobedience, and present death as the punishment of our innocence : it regulates the love of life, the desire of pleasures, and forces the most alluring temptation to give place to the observance of those commandments, that cannot be violated, without a grievous sin. This degree of humility is of strict obligation on all men ; there is no salvation without it : for whosoever is disposed rather to offend God than lose his life, to break his commands than

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to intermit his unlawful pleasures, to forfeit God's favour than his estate, is in the direct way of damnation.

Tho' this degree of humility be necessary to salvation, yet it is not sufficient; for we seldom execute all we resolve; we always fall short of what we propose: the force of temptation dispirits our first vigour, and the weakness of our nature weighs so heavy upon us, that our resolutions fall lower than we intended: so that whosoever purposes only to avoid all mortal sins, will certainly fall into some. This is not the humility of Jesus Christ, because it seeks not abasement and contempt, as it were willingly, and with pleasure, but out of the fear of damnation.

The second degree of humility comes nearer our Saviour's than the first: this puts us in a state of indifference in regard of wealth or poverty, of health or sickness, of a short or of a long life, when the interest of God's glory, and of our salvation, is equally concerned. This, without doubt, is sufficient for salvation; for he, who resolves firmly, upon no consideration, to commit with deliberation the least sin, in all probability will not fall into a mortal offence; and tho' he does sometimes fall, through inadvertence, into a venial sin, God by a prompt and speedy grace will raise him.

But tho' he, who comes thus far, has made good progress in the doctrine of humility, he has not yet touch'd the top of its perfection; for there is a third degree, more noble, because more disinterested and more resembling that of our Saviour's, and consists in this: that tho' health contributed to the glory of God as much as sickness, a high station as a low one, contempt as esteem; yet, to resemble our blessed Saviour, I would
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chuse rather to suffer the pangs of diseases, than to enjoy the satisfaction of health, the lowest place than the highest, and death than life.

This is properly the favourite virtue of Jesus Christ, the perfection of humility: this he taught in his sermons, practised in his actions, and not only recommends, but imposes as a duty upon all his disciples: this removes all those obstacles that stop the conduits of grace, and stand between us and perfection: for it wholly disengages us from the love of the world, and, what is more, from that of our selves, the cause and origin of all our disorders.

With humility, it is impossible to be a sinner; without it, as hard to be a perfect Christian: virtues are dangerous without it, and with it vices are often advantageous. The poor Publican entered into the temple a great sinner; but, because he was humble, he went out a saint, and declared so by the mouth of God; but the Pharisee, forgetting his sins, presented to God a catalogue of his virtues, and became a sinner the moment he became proud. Humility turned a debauchee into a saint, and pride a saint into a sinner: the one makes sins themselves a step to heaven, and the other employs virtues as instruments of damnation.

And here I cannot but admire the goodness of God, who has so disposed things, that our salvation has no dependance on grandeur, or other gifts of nature or fortune, but on humility: for all men are not able to make a figure in the world: all cannot raise themselves to an honourable post: but it is in every one's power to be humble; they may condemn esteem, tho' they are unprovided of talents to purchase it. Wealth is not at every one's command; but all may be content with a mediocrity,

crity, and rather desire to want than to abound. It is not within the reach of many to form great designs for the advancement of God's glory; but all may humble themselves upon the consideration of their incapacity, and chearfully resign to all the dispensations of Providence. You have not the gift of prayer; but you may for this very reason humble your self in prayer; and thus you will pray much, tho' you seem not to pray at all.

That you may know upon occasions how to practise this virtue, I have here set down instructions.

First, Submit your judgment to the order of Providence, and obey with humility the commands of superiors, when they appear not evidently sinful. Order and reason exact this submission; and, tho' their injunctions are imprudent, your compliance is not.

Secondly, Receive misfortunes and afflictions, not with murmurs and complaints, but with patience, resignation and joy, and persuade yourself, God treats you with tenderness in the very heat of his severity. Ascribe your sufferings to the enormity of your crimes, and the goodness of your Creator, who punishes you in time, to spare you in eternity.

Thirdly, Fly honour, and vain dignities, as dangerous; the company of great men as slavish, flattery as pestilential, and applause as ridiculous. They are empty nothings in themselves, tho' courted by fools and madmen, who judge by sense, and are imposed on by bare appearances.

Fourthly, Never speak to your own advantage; a panegyrick upon your self is the most biting satire, and whosoever thinks he deserves praise, is worthy of the highest contempt. If God has bestowed

stowed on you any favours, thank your benefactor, and keep them to your self: and, if necessity obliges you to disclose them, do it with modesty and moderation.

Fifthly, Despise no body but your self; tho' your neighbour be guilty of a thousand villanies, rather pity his misfortune than insult it; and remember, that, if you are not guilty of the same disorders, you owe your innocence to God's assistance, not to your own force, and, if he abandons you, you would sink into the most horrible abominations.

Sixthly, Receive injuries with patience, and affronts with unconcern. You have injured God by your offences; you have affronted him by your insolence; so that you deserve ill treatment and disregard, altho' they do ill who offer it.

Seventhly, Excuse all faults, but your own; speak ill of no body, but your self, not even this without great caution; for there is a certain pride in humiliation, and a vanity in seeming to covet contempt; and, if we affect to declaim upon our own imperfections, it is a sign we desire not to be believed, and that we expect the hearer's esteem for disesteeming our selves.

O my soul, let me humble my self, that God may raise me; let me cast my self under the feet of all men, not to be cast under those of the devil hereafter. My virtues preach humility, no less than my vices. These are the testimonies of my ingratitude, and those the witnesses of my Maker's goodness. His liberality alone gave me the power to do well, and his bounty the will. Without his assistance, I am nothing; nay, (what is more) an impotent, a rebellious, a wicked nothing. Why then dost thou swell, O dust and ashes! why dost thou not abase thy self below thy original earth,
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and desire to be trampled on for God's sake, who was pleased to be trod upon for thine? I value neither the esteem nor contempt of men: the one makes me no better, nor the other worse: if thou, O God, judgest me worthy of thy favour, I am content; and on this condition I shall deem my self more happy on a gibbet, than on a throne.



SEVEN



SEVEN REFLECTIONS

ON THE

Passion of our Blessed Saviour.

REFLECTION I.

GOSPEL of St. Matthew, Chap. xxvi. Verse

36. *Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto his disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder.*

37. *And he took with him Peter, and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful, and very heavy.*

38. *Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death: tarry ye here and watch with me.*

39. *And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.*

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The MORAL REFLECTION.

THE consideration of our Saviour's Passion, and those torments he suffered for our sins, is a subject, which ought to raise in us a sincere detestation of them, and at the same time a tender affection for him, who has loved us to such an excess, as to reconcile us to his heavenly Father at the expence of his precious blood.

Give me leave therefore to present a tragedy, that once split rocks, astonish'd heaven, surpris'd hell, and drew compassion from all nature. Man alone sat unconcern'd, for whom and by whom the innocent fell a victim of love on the one side, a sacrifice of fury on the other. It is the death of God made man, I intend to propose to your consideration. You shall behold him, first wounded in his reputation with calumnies, then torn with whips, pierced with thorns, and in the end nailed to a cross, and expiring between thieves; as if the most infamous of deaths was too mild a punishment, unless suffered in the company of the most ignominious malefactors. All these torments he underwent for our sins, and, what is more stupendous, by our cruelty. Never was there seen more rage, never more love: *That* was extreme, *This* infinite, and both without example. The Creator was put to death; the creatures play'd the executioners. These practis'd cruelties to murder him, and he made use of their very crime to save them.

The raising of Lazarus from death to life kindled the Pharisees rage against our blessed Saviour, and his glorious entry into Jerusalem blew it into a flame. *Perceive ye, how ye prevail nothing?*

thing? (said they) *behold the whole world is gone after him*, John xii. 19. The miracles he wrought drew some, the sanctity of his doctrine others; all are charmed with his sweetness, and all respect, to adoration, his person. They enter therefore into consult, not to debate upon his doctrine, not to question his miracles; for that was without reproach, and these manifest beyond dispute; but to contrive his death, and to put in execution out of hand their resolutions.

But why all these consultations to apprehend him? Was he not daily in the temple? surrounded with a multitude that either flock'd to learn, or to censure? Could they not bribe an assassin to dispatch him? No question, but many would have undertaken this bloody execution, either to court their leaders, or to better their fortunes. But this would not appease the priests rage: they knew, a secret murder would plead them guilty, and him innocent; that his sanctity and miracles would speak more loudly for him, than all their calumnies against him; that he would live in the esteem of those, who had been witnesses of his prodigies, and blest with his conversation.

They resolved therefore to stab his reputation, before they butchered his body, and to draw the whole nation into the crime, that no body might compassionate him, or condemn the actors. And no method seem'd more compendious than to bring him to an open trial; for the vulgar easily believe those guilty, who are condemned by authority; and that they die justly, who fall by the hand of justice.

But why did they decoy an apostle? First, to justify their rage, and to enforce their own accusations; for what was more natural than to suppose, that a man, so favoured by our Saviour, betray'd him

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him merely out of a principle of conscience, and sense of his duty? Secondly, to bring his doctrine into contempt, and by consequence his person. All the world knew, the traitor had been trained up in his school three whole years, that he had heard his sermons, and embrac'd his maxims; was it not therefore probable, the enraged multitude at least would lay the crimes of the scholar at the Master's door, and impute the avarice and treason of the one to the corrupt principles of the other?

If we may believe St. Hilary, no attempt upon our Saviour's honour or person touch'd him so nearly as the perfidy of this seduced apostle; nay, it forced out of his sacred mouth this doleful complaint, *My soul is sorrowful even unto death*, not out of apprehension of those torments his enemies were preparing for him, and his love would undergo, but of grief for the traitor, and the scandal that would fall upon his companions and fellow-disciples. Yet our dear Lord, who came into the world to save man, would die by his cruelty; nay, as guilty, to free him from guilt: and, what is strange, he made use of his very crimes, to purchase his pardon, and to reconcile the malefactor to his heavenly Father, whilst he endeavoured to render all reconciliation impossible.

He went therefore, after the last supper, to the place of combat, with his disciples; and, as our misfortune began in a garden, so he chose a garden to procure our happiness. Here he began the fight, that ended on mount Calvary, and overcome death by dying with pain and ignominy on the cross.

He commanded his apostles to sit down, whilst he retired to pray: here his love conspired with his enemies cruelty to augment his pains, and he even wrought a miracle to make his soul undergo an inward martyrdom, as much more severe than that his
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body was to suffer, as his love to man exceeded the rage of his tormentors; and for this purpose he breaks off all commerce between the superior part of his soul and the inferior, between God and man; lest God essentially happy should hinder man from being miserable: he therefore sets at liberty the passions of fear and grief, suffer'd his imagination to cast before him a dismal prospect of all his future torments; and, because he would drink up the bitter cup to the dregs, he commands reason to set before his eyes all that was most ignominious, most afflicting, most sensible.

The torments of his body assailed him not altogether; one made room for the other; the end of the first was only the beginning of the second; but the same moment they all assaulted his soul, accompanied by every circumstance the most inhuman and barbarous. Could our Lord's love be more inventive, to make him suffer, or to persuade us how much he loves man; nay, and how much he desires our love, and how much he deserves it?

Yet, O strange ingratitude! all this kindness is unable to move us, I do not say to love, but even to pity: he works miracles to suffer for us, and (were it in our power) we would work a hundred that we might suffer nothing; yet alas! our dear Saviour gained nothing by his cruel martyrdom but pain; he reserv'd the torments for himself, and transfer'd all the profit upon us; but we shall reap the whole fruit of our sufferings, even, for one moment of pain, an eternal pleasure. If therefore we have not the courage to meet mortifications, at least let us receive them with patience and submission. Let us turn those tribulations to advantage, we cannot avoid: to change necessity into virtue, is the lowest perfection of a Christian.

The dismal prospect of his future torments made so strong an impression upon him, that, seiz'd by

a fit of fear and grief, he *began to shake and tremble*, says the text. But O! how canst thou tremble, who suffer only because you will? what need you fear, who are Omnipotent? Sadness proceeds from evil we cannot avoid, and fear from evil we cannot overcome; you flung yourself into this deplorable state by choice, not necessity; and are able, with one *It is I*, either to mollify your enemies rage, or to annihilate them. Suspend at least a miracle, and you cannot fear, because you cannot feel; your soul will be above the reach of sadness, and your body of pain. It enjoys the beatifical vision; stop not the effects, and the one will be drowned in pleasure, the other overcast with glory.

No, no; not weakness, but love, gives force to fear, and strength to grief; and because the prospect of all his torments did not raise it to the pitch he desired, he took at once a perfect view of all the crimes past, present, and to come. O! what a killing spectacle was here! If he look'd back, he saw millions of souls drown'd in flames, as severe as lasting, out of all capacity of receiving any ease, any refreshment, by all those torments he was going to suffer, and by those streams of blood he was ready to shed for their redemption. If he view'd the present, he beheld the whole world buried in darkness, ignorance, and idolatry; every one squared his worship by his inclinations; dead men received adoration in temples, who alive deserved the fire; and men paid divine honours to those, whose vices threw them below the level of beasts. The Jews indeed acknowledged the true God; but their practice answered not their belief; and tho' their religion was better than that of their neighbours, their actions were not less detestable. If he look'd forward, he saw the very Christians, who profess this doctrine, disown it in their conduct,

duet, betray it in practice, and consequently their souls too, nay, and his sacred Person once more to the scorn of Jews, and contempt of infidels: he foresaw, in fine, that tho' one drop of his blood was sufficient to redeem a thousand worlds, the effusion of it all would not save one; that it would neither soften our stony hearts, nor gain our love, and consequently not procure our salvation.

These melancholy considerations threw our compassionate Saviour into fits of grief and trembling, and forc'd out of his mouth this doleful complaint, *My soul is sorrowful unto death*, and out of his sacred body streams of blood; his grief was so extreme, that it cast him into an agony, and drew every nerve into convulsions; nay, which is strange, when it had drained by sweat the natural moisture of the body, it wrung out blood.

Ah dear Christians! behold your God and Saviour plunged in grief, and weltering in his own blood; he weeps, because you rejoice, and lets out streams of blood, to cool the violence of your passions, and to cure the distempers of your souls! If your sins weigh so heavy on the innocent, how low will they sink the guilty? If he sighs and groans at the view of your sad state, is it not time that you yourselves should deplore it? Certainly, the condition of a sinner must be deplorable beyond expression, when, bathed in tears, and blood, God himself laments it, to the excess of agony and convulsions. He knows the guilt of sin; he knows the greatness of the punishment; he proportions his grief to both: seeing therefore this *is infinite*, these must be exorbitant beyond comprehension.

We must be obstinate, if we profit not by thy grief, my agonizing Saviour; insensible, if we compassionate not thy torments; and unreasonable, if we detest not our crimes, now the cause of thy

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sufferings, and which will one day be, if unrepented that of our damnation.

Oh! *My soul is sorrowful unto death*, for having given thee the occasion of espousing my miseries, to expiate my crimes, of weeping to soften my stony heart with thy tears, and to cleanse it with thy blood: I see now (what before I would not understand) that sin (like the book in the prophet Ezekiel) is bitter in the throat, tho' sweet in the mouth; that tho' the act be pleasing, its consequences are terrible; and that it is much more easy to commit a crime, than to satisfy divine justice for the offence. *My soul is sorrowful unto death* for having procured thine; give me, O Saviour of the world, a flood of tears to drown my past sins, and grace, the price of thy sufferings, that I may only live to thy love, and die in thy favour.

REFLECTION II.

GOSPEL of St. Matth. Chap. xxvi. Verse

44. *And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words.*

45. *Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest; behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.*

46. *Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me.*

The MORAL REFLECTION.

THE Son of God, now struck with fear, overwhelmed with grief, sorrowful unto death, void of comfort from without, oppress'd with sorrow from within, drawn to the cross by love, withdrawn by fear, prostrates himself upon the ground, and addresses this prayer to his heavenly Father: *O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt*, Matth. xxvi. 39.

Behold, Christian reader, your Redeemer in this humble posture, and learn how to behave yourself when misfortunes assail you, when enemies persecute you, or diseases put you to the torture. Fly not out into impatience, nor beg comfort of men, but address yourself to God, and ask relief of him, who alone can assuage your misery, and supply you with force to bear it.

But then approach like a suppliant, with humility; not like the Pharisees, with pride and presumption; let your posture be decent and respectful, suitable to your baseness, and becoming that Majesty whose assistance you implore. If Jesus, the Son of God, lay prostrate upon the ground, is it not fit that man, conceived in sin, should invoke his Maker, at least, upon his knees? let your heart petition with your tongue, lest, whilst you ask a blessing, you deserve a curse, and commit a sin in suing for pardon.

When you have proposed your necessities, leave the event to God, and neither grow proud if he grants your request, nor murmur if he refuses it; for a favour may sometimes be a punishment; he may grant out of anger, and deny out of mercy. Our Saviour has taught us, that our prayer must begin and end with a *Not as I will,*

but as thou wilt. Tho' our first parents bought the knowledge of good and evil at the expence of their innocence, we are almost ignorant of both ; we judge by passion more than reason, and think those things best for us, which will certainly lead us to destruction. With what earnestness did poor Rachel beg for a child ; she protested she should die, without one ; but alas ! she died, because she had one ; barrenness might have prolong'd her life, which fruitfulness shortened. When therefore we expose our miseries to God, and desire release ; when we ask an alms, and beg a favour ; let it always be with this proviso, that his will be done, not ours ; and we must be equally resigned, to receive a grant, or a refusal.

When you are seized with a sharp and painful infirmity, cry out, with our Redeemer, My heavenly Father, *Behold him whom thou lovest is sick*, John ii. 3. my poor body groans under the pangs of a distemper ; I am a trouble to others, and a burthen to myself ; if possible, deliver me from this cruel martyrdom, *but not as I will, but as thou wilt* ; give me strength to suffer it with patience and resignation to thy providence, and I am content.

You are upon the point of being pleaded out of an estate ; authority overpowers right, and bribes bear down justice : the greatness of the danger raises as many furies to haunt you, as you have thoughts in the day, or dreams in the night : beseech, conjure your heavenly Father, to calm this tempest, which hangs over your head, *If it be possible, let this cup pass from me* : to fall from abundance into poverty, from esteem into contempt, is a very sensible change to human nature ; it is hard to endure the fall with patience ; *But not as I will, but as thou wilt, O Lord.* Your goodness gave me what I possess, and, if you think fit to re-
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call the gift, I have no reason to complain: I know indeed prosperity is the most pleasant way to heaven, but adversity the more secure.

You are attack'd on all sides by temptations; you neither find satisfaction in company, nor quiet in solitude; your prayers seem unregarded, and your tears without effect; importune heaven to remove this bitter cup; conjure down these temptations that infest me; dissipate the darkness that clouds my understanding; remove these objects that allure my will; lay the tempest that riles my soul, and almost drowns me in despair: *But not as I will, but as thou wilt*: I submit myself wholly to thy orders, and renounce all satisfaction in this world, to enjoy happiness in the other.

We must approach the throne of mercy with this disposition; and, if we persevere with respect and confidence, God will grant our petition, by removing those evils which we fear, or by supplying us with grace to support them with chearfulness and resolution: for when we throw all our concerns into his hands, he can no more abandon us, than he can cease to be good; no more frustrate our expectation, than he can break his word, and fall back from his promise.

When our Saviour retired to pray, he commanded St. Peter by name, and the other apostles in general, to watch and pray; but scarce had he withdrawn himself from their sight, but, unmindful of his orders, they lay down to sleep, as if they had no concern for their Master, no regard for his commands: it seems strange (not to say impossible) that St. John, so belov'd of our Saviour, that St. Peter, who so passionately loved him, who saw him in his agony, who heard from his sacred mouth, *My soul is sorrowful even unto death*, ver. 38. should shew such an indifference in this his extremity of grief and melancholy.

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But we shall cease to wonder, if we cast an eye upon the common practice of Christians : there we shall see the conduct of the apostles copied to the life, nay, and even in a matter of the highest concern, I mean our salvation. For does not the same God enjoin us most severely to watch and pray, *that we enter not into temptation*, ver. 41. does he not warn us to stand upon our guard, because he will call us to judgment, when we least dream of such a summons, and decide our destiny, on which depends an eternity of joy or of despair ? This charitable admonition makes no deeper impression upon us, than our Saviour's command to the apostles, *who fell asleep*: we sleep, instead of watching, and pour out blasphemous oaths and curses instead of prayers: Nay, (what is yet more incredible) we sleep not with a good conscience, as the apostles did, but charged with sin, environed with devils, who only expect God's commission to make us companions of their punishment, as we are of their guilt.

This is not drowsiness, but a deep, a mortal lethargy ; one word of our Saviour roused the poor apostles, and put them to the blush ; they followed him at the first command of an *Arise, let us be going*, ver. 46. But neither the repeated command of our blessed Saviour, nor the exhortations of preachers, nor the sudden deaths of our companions, are able to awake us. We sleep as unconcerned in sin, as if we reposed under the protection of innocence, and fear nothing but to be sensible of our sad condition. *You, who sleep, arise ; watch, and pray*, that you may obtain grace to deplore your past sins, and strength to avoid them for the future.

Love having conquered fear, and obedience to his Father's commands prevailed over sorrow, our
blessed

bleſſed Saviour meets his enemies, led by Judas, *who had receiv'd a band of men and officers from the chief-prieſts and Pharifees*, John xviii. 3. O unfortunate Judas! If you did but know your happineſs, *even now* you are come to betray your Lord and Saviour! He meets you to ſave you; his mercy exceeds the heinouſneſs of your crimes: ſay but once, with a contrite heart, *I have ſinned*, and you will hear from his ſacred mouth, *Your ſins are forgiven you*: Give ear; he yet calls you friend; within ſome hours there will be a chaos, will ſeparate you from his mercy, tho' not from his juſtice: You will be lodged for eternity with the rebellious ſpirits; far from heaven, out of the reach of mercy, and ever drown'd in a ſea of deſpair.

But becauſe that kind ſalutation, Friend, made no impreſſion upon the traitor's heart, our Saviour reſolv'd to fright him to repentance, and with one word, *I am HE*, laid him and all his companions upon the ground, half dead with fear, and out of their ſenſes with amazement: who would not have thought, that Judas, after ſuch a caveat, ſhould have changed his reſolutions? He ſaw, by what his Maſter had done, he was able to do more; and that he, who had ſtruck him with his voice to the ground, could with the ſame eaſe ſtrike him dead; but this wretch was ſo bent on his Lord's ruin, he never thought of his own ſafety, and having pawned his conſcience in the chief-prieſts ſervice, he now expoſed his life; he had ſtept over the bounds of his duty, and now he paſſ'd thoſe of ſhame and impudence.

For being come to himſelf, he returned to his treaſon, and gave his Maſter a kiſs, the fatal ſign to lay hands on him. Then they ſeized upon Jeſus with noiſe and clamour; the diſciples fly; the ſoldiers load him with chains, the Jews with ſcoffs;

some insult, others calumniate him, no body has courage to defend him, nor even humanity to pity him. He is hurried from tribunal to tribunal, questioned by Annas, condemned by Caiaphas, scorned by Herod, scourg'd by Pilate, crucified by the soldiers; and as he died for all, so all mankind seem'd either to revile or murder him. We shall not find in story a malefactor so forlorn, who was not protected by some, and pitied by others; Christ alone was the object of a hatred as great as it was universal; one friend betray'd him, others abandoned him, and his very favourite denied him: the Jews conspired his ruin with the Gentiles, the people with the nobility, the clergy with the laity, the doctors with the illiterate rabble; and those, who dipp'd not their hands in his blood, stabb'd his reputation with their tongue; *they that hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head.* Ps. xix. 4. Yet this rage so furious, this hatred so universal, this conduct so unaccountable, came not from injuries received, but from the very favours he had done them; not from his crimes, but from his virtues. In fine, they swore his death, because he had raised Lazarus to life; and treated him with outrage and contempt, because all the city revered him as a saint, and received him for a prophet.

O Judas! once an apostle, now an apostate; once a friend, now a traytor to thy Lord and Master; behold the dismal consequences of thy avarice, the dire effects of thy salutation, *Hail Master!* But alas! I fear, many, who condemn thy dissimulation, are complices of thy treason, and betray their Lord with a *Hail Master!* in their mouths, and a *Crucify him* in their hearts: for does not St. Paul declare those guilty of the blood of Christ, who receive unworthily his body and blood in the blessed Sacrament? 1 Cor. xi. 29. To communicate unworthily,

unworthily, is to approach the holy table with a mortal sin unrepented of, and to rise from the holy table, to return to that company, that has debauch'd us, to those occasions that have often baffled our pious resolutions, and drawn us into disorders. No, no, dear reader, such communicantes, like Judas, with a kiss, betray the Son of man, under a disguise of reverence and adoration; they are apostles without, Judas's within; *Betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss, Luke xxii. 48?*

REFLECTION III.

GOSPEL of St. Matthew, Chap. xxvi. Verse

69. *Now Peter sat without in the palace, and a damsel came unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee.*

70. *But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest.*

71. *And when he was gone out into the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth.*

72. *And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man.*

73. *And after a while came unto him they that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely thou also art one of them, for thy speech bewrayeth thee.*

74. *Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man.*

The MORAL REFLECTION.

ALTHO' St. Peter had courage enough to draw his sword in his Master's defence, and perchance, in the first heat of his passion, had love more than enough to have died for him; yet no sooner was our Saviour made prisoner, but the apostle's resolution began to waver, and, when he was dragged out of sight, all courage vanish'd from his heart, so that, resolved to fly, he was only solicitous to retire with security; night favoured his design, and fear added haste to his flight; he followed his companions, who, having promised less, were more pardonable; *They all forsook him and fled*, Mark xiv. 50.

But when this panic fear was over, and reason returned, he perceived his fault, and drop'd some tears to deplore it; he wish'd he had been less presumptuous or more courageous, or at least, that he had rather relied on his Master's assistance than his own force; yet this defeat did not so daunt his spirits, but he fancied himself as able to act and suffer as before, and therefore he resolved to wipe off the stains of his former weakness with some new actions of valour, and rather die with his dear Master, than live without him.

Alas! it is easy to condemn dangers at a distance, when vanity magnifies our strength, and passion will not suffer us to examine that of our enemy. Poor St. Peter learn'd by experience, that sudden resolutions meet not always with success, when they are contriv'd without reason, and push'd on without prudence.

Scarce had he left the place of retreat, when the old symptoms of fear returned; if love brought arguments to go on, sense alledged more to recoil,
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and fear was more convinced of the latter, than reason of the former. It is true, he had received so many favours from his Master, that he could not chuse but love him; yet he was not such an admirer of self-denial as to hate himself: in a word, his love was too weak to embolden him to accompany his Master, and too strong to suffer him quite to forsake him; so that on a sudden he turn'd politician, and fell upon an expedient to do both and neither; that is, so to follow his Saviour, that he might seem to leave him, and so to leave him, that he might have the glory of following, and the security of abandoning him. *But Peter followed him afar off*: he followed him, because he loved him; but at a distance, because he feared.

But this politic trimming flung him nigher the danger and his ruin, than if, through love, he had bore up close to his Master, or, through fear, quite abandoned him; one glance of his divine eye had darted new vigour into his soul; his omnipotency would have protected him; his arms would have been a sanctuary to receive him alive, or his breast the altar, on which he had fallen dead; or, if he had absented himself, he had avoided a new sin by flying the occasion; but present love and a presumptuous hope so enveigled him, that he never thought of the danger, and supposing the misfortune improbable, he made it inevitable.

He stole at length into the palace of the high-priest, irresolute what post to take, what part to act. Solitude seem'd dangerous, and company not secure; at last he herded with the rabble, supposing all men's thoughts were so taken up with the subject of his Master's trial, that they had neither time nor leisure to spend one upon him. But, poor man! the event answered not his expectati-

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ons; for these profligate wretches espous'd their Masters sentiments, and bent all their discourse to the disadvantage of the prisoner. The apostle was so assur'd of his Master's innocence, that he could not hear the calumnies with indifference; fain would he confute them; but fear tied his tongue; so that he resolved to hear all their blasphemies without concern, seeing he could not discover the falsity without peril: but he had always the misfortune to break his purposes with the same facility he made them; his very concern to shew no concern betray'd it, and his struggling to stifle his resentment tore off the disguise. A maid read his heart in his face, and, altho' she judg'd he was no great friend to the prisoner, because he did not take his part, yet she was sure he was no enemy, because he gave no applause to their blasphemies; she therefore put this question, *Art not thou also one of this man's disciples?* John xviii. 17.

This query, tho' started at random, so amazed the apostle, that he knew not where he was, much less what to answer: he run from resolution to resolution, found reason for each, and arguments against all; so that he knew not whether he should be silent, or speak, or, if he did, what to answer.

But why, poor saint, all this perplexity? Beware only of a denial, and you cannot miss: What authority has she to ask? what obligation have you to answer? The answer is without danger, when the question is put without commission. But suppose you should once more confess, *Thou art Christ the Son of God*, what misfortune do you apprehend? you have no estate to forfeit; the little you once possess'd was generously abandon'd for your Master, *Behold we have left all:*
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Does the fear of chains and confinement dash your courage? Behold what your Master suffers for the love of you: why do you refuse to undergo some restraint for the love of him? he will sweeten your pains, and reward your sufferings: does the face of death scare you? Is it not more advantageous to lose your life for God, than to preserve it by apostacy? to offer it in sacrifice to your Maker, than to let it fall a victim to nature? But cowardise had now got the ascendant over love, and fear had so stifled reason, that he had neither the courage to be silent, nor yet to speak as he ought, and so return'd this shameful answer: *Woman, I know not the man.* He disowns him for his Master, denies he is his disciple, and thus a vain terror makes him at once abjure his faith, and renounce the apostleship.

But, pray, refresh your memory; did not you confess, he was the Son of the living God? And when some of his followers abandoned him, and he question'd the loyalty of the apostles, with a *Will ye also go away?* will ye also desert from me? Did you not then return this answer, *To whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life,* John vi. 67? Where shall we retire? your doctrine is divine as well as your person. Did not questioning only your affection cast you into a fit of melancholy? *Lord, thou knowest that I love thee,* John xxi. 15. Could you answer questions you heard not, or love a person you knew not? Alas! the scene is changed; Christ then received applause, now he lies under reproach and contempt; Peter was then a saint, but is now a sinner!

Scarce had those fatal words, *I know not the man,* pass'd his lips, but he wish'd himself able to recal them, yet durst not promise to be more courageous,

courageous, so much did fear and love divide him : yet his fear was unable to conceal his misfortune, and his love too weak to deplore it : like a man that would do something, and can resolve on nothing, he rose from the place where he sat, and went he knew not where ; yet his guilty conscience pursued him, and he, who before trembled at the sight of others, was now become a terror to himself. In fine, having neither courage to fly, nor heart to fight, nor reason to consider, he returns to the place, conscious of his crime, never dreaming he should back his denial with oaths and perjury.

It is certainly imprudence to commit a sin ; but it is madness to continue in it ; at its first entrance it wounds the soul ; but the continuation kills it, and casts all its faculties into a lethargy : conscience sleeps, passion grows imperious, and the sinner insensible.

The first denial cast the apostle into strange convulsions ; but, within an hour, remorse retired, together with shame ; so that he seem'd to have forfeited sense as well as grace. He thought his honour engaged to stand to his first denial, and so resolved, in case of necessity, to back it with an oath, Matth. xxvi. 72. Nay, at length he joined curses to oaths, and imprecations to both, Mark xiv. 72. Thus by degrees this poor apostle fell from sin to sin, till he sunk into the abyfs of perjury, infidelity and blasphemy.

The causes of Peter's fall are the same that plunge almost all mankind into disorders ; presumption on the one hand, and negligence on the other. *The Physician's prophecy* (says St. Augustin) *is now fulfilled, and the disciple convicted of presumption.*

He fancied himself so courageous, that neither prisons were able to daunt him, nor even death

to shake his resolution : hence he flung himself upon temptation without necessity, and slept in the garden, whilst he should have been at his prayers, and imploring God's goodness to send grace to his assistance. But he was so confident of his own strength, that he neglected to sue for a new supply, and so fell into the crimes of ingratitude to his Master, and infidelity to his Maker.

Let us learn by this sad example, first, To diffide in our selves, and to put our confidence in God ; we must not be so faint-hearted as to think we can do nothing, nor so presumptuous as to think we are a match for any temptation : our salvation flows from two principles, the grace of God, and our co-operation ; *Not I, but the grace of God which was with me*, says the apostle, 1 Cor. xv. 10. without that we can do nothing, and with it all things. God will not refuse us the favour, if we ask it with humility, fervour and perseverance ; and if we do not, we deserve to feel the sad consequence of our negligence.

Secondly, Not to rely upon the fair promises of friendship, nor on any creature, tho' he lies under a thousand obligations to be faithful : for self-interest will overlook them. St. Peter lay under the highest obligations to his Lord and Master ; yet fear cancell'd them all, and moved him, by a sinful denial, to affront his Benefactor. If Christ met with so signal an ingratitude, how can we, in prudence, expect from any creature more fidelity ? and why then are we so foolish as to purchase men's favour at the expence of God's, from whom alone we can expect fidelity ? He abandons no man that does not first abandon him ; he accepts most graciously the least good actions, and rewards with a most bountiful hand the greatest.

If the sin of this apostle instructs the faithful, his repentance does much more: if we can draw profit from his fault, we may, without question, from his tears: in fine, what fruit may we not reap from virtue, seeing vice it self is instructive? I should therefore wrong the apostle and the reader, if, having published his fall, I conceal his repentance. Conscience may upbraid us with our crimes, but grace alone is able to conceal them. Our blessed Saviour, tho' shamefully denied by one he had favoured to such a height of kindness and liberality, would not abandon the afflicted criminal, who as yet was rather troubled at his fall, than repentant, and rather ashamed of his cowardise than of his sin: therefore, turning about, he let fall a glance of his divine eyes upon Peter, and at the same time touch'd his heart with his grace, and set it presently on a flame. Immediately he turn'd off fear and bid adieu to cowardice. He blush'd at his former boasting, yet more at his perfidy, and yet most of all at his Master's goodness. The vehemence of his grief tied his tongue, so that, unable to speak, he was only capable of weeping, and wept the more, because love told him, he could not weep enough. He had sinned by speaking, and now endeavoured to atone for his fault by weeping, and acknowledged him Son of God by his tears, whom he had denied with his tongue.

He left the place, conscious of his crime, and the company that debauch'd him; *He went out of the hall.* The apostle knew, that a sincere sorrow for past, implies a precaution against future offences, and that whosoever loves the occasion hates not the sin. His sorrow was efficacious, that is, he never relaps'd: in fine, it *produced fruit worthy of repentance.* He preached the Divinity of
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of his Master before the Scribes and Pharisees themselves with courage, and suffered stripes and ignominy with joy. He carried his name to the Gentiles, and boldly published his law to an idolatrous and barbarous world, never ceasing to repent, till he ceas'd to live.

Here is a scheme of true repentance left us by a fallen apostle ; and I wish all Christians, that pass for penitents, would follow his example : if they intend to receive pardon, they must copy this original, which God has been pleas'd to transmit to posterity, for our instruction and imitation.

First, therefore, it is not sufficient to be sorry for our past sin, but we must resolve to stand firm to our duty for the future ; that is, we must resolve rather to forego honour, wealth, friends, and even our lives, than offend God mortally : without this, repentance is mere grimace. I doubt many return from repenting to offending, and become greater sinners than they were, for want of this requisite : and who can persuade themselves they have an efficacious purpose, who relapse into the same disorders immediately ; who seek the occasions, and rather increase the number of their sins than diminish it.

Secondly, Our sorrow must produce *fruits worthy of repentance*, fruits that not only lodge in the breast, but appear in our actions. " Small sins " (says St. Austin) may be expiated by light mortifications, but the punishment due to great offences cannot be remitted without great austerities." In short, according to the measure of the sin shall the measure of stripes be, Deut. xxv. 2. The mortification must bear proportion with the fault, both in intenseness and duration. When disorders have been of a long continuance, the mortification must not end so soon. There is no pro-

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portion between a state of sin that has lasted many months, and perhaps years, and a mortification that begins and ends almost the same moment. No, no ; those, who fall continually into sin, should, like St. Peter, continually melt in tears, and put no other bounds to their sorrow, but the last moment of their lives.

Thirdly, The mortification must be proportionable to the quality of our sins ; and therefore, if we invade our neighbour's right, either by violence, deceit, or over-reaching, we must repair the damage by an entire restitution. Have we worried our brother's good name by detraction or calumny, we must recant ; and if a private recantation will not suffice, it must be made in publick, that the satisfaction may be as notorious as the injury, and our repentance as much talk'd of as our sin. We must punish dangerous visits with solitude, intemperance with abstinence, and drunkenness with sobriety ; for repentance supposes a change of life, a hatred of those things we loved before, and a love of those we hated.

Oh, my Saviour ! let me learn by thy apostle's fall to distrust my own strength, and to put all my confidence in thee : my nature bends to earth, and nothing but thy grace can raise my heart to heaven.

REFLECTION IV.

GOSPEL of St. Matthew, Chap. xxvi. Verse

57. *And they that had laid hold on Jesus, led him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled.*

58. *But Peter followed him afar off, unto the high priest's palace, and went in, and sat with the servants to see the end.*

59. *Now the chief priests and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus to put him to death,*

60. *But found none : yea, tho' many false witnesses came, yet found they none. At the last came two false witnesses.*

67. *Then did they spit in his face, and buffeted him, and others smote him with the palms of their hands,*

68. *Saying, Prophecy unto us, thou Christ, who is he that smote thee ?*

The MORAL REFLECTION.

I Cannot begin this Reflection without exclaiming with the prophet, Let the heavens stand amazed, the angels tremble, and nature put on mourning : the innocent stands at the bar, the guilty sits on the bench, truth is examined by forgery, Jesus by Annas and Caiaphas. The Judge of the living and the dead is judged by the chief priests, the Creator condemn'd by the creature, the most holy executed for a blasphemer, and, in one word, the Saviour of the world for a seducer and an impostor !

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Behold therefore, dear reader, thy Redeemer loaded with chains, bound with ropes, environ'd with guards, in the posture of a criminal: the high priest mounts the tribunal, the Scribes and Pharisees surround him: who would not imagine, that before a bench, so grave, so august, and, in appearance, so upright, innocence should triumph? But alas! revenge can lurk under the disguise of moderation, cruelty under the mask of justice, and impiety can put on all the features of virtue.

They examine his doctrine, question his life; every one interrogates, and no body will wait for an answer: they cannot prove upon him a crime, and will not give him time to manifest his innocence. Oh Annas! oh Caiaphas! if you interrogate, why do you not hear him? he asks no favour, nor demands his liberty; this he desires not, the other he expects not.

Caiaphas at length conjur'd him to tell the assembly, if he were the Son of God; not to know the truth, but to convict him of blasphemy: *I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God, Matth. xxvi. 63.* To remove all pretext of ignorance, and to teach his followers, that they must rather expose their lives to the fury of tyrants, than conceal their religion, when juridically questioned about it, he answered, *Thou hast said*: my doctrine attests it, and the miracles I have wrought prove my Divinity beyond demonstration. Have I not given light to the blind, limbs to the lame, and life to the dead? If you will not believe my words, believe these wonders; or at least, if you dare, deny them.

But Caiaphas, who sought not truth, catch'd at this occasion to declare him a blasphemer; transported,

ported, therefore, on the one side with joy, on the other with fury, he cries out, *He hath spoken blasphemy, what farther need have we of witnesses?* It is superfluous to call more witnesses, unnecessary to impeach him of more crimes; *He hath spoken blasphemy*, at the very bar, in the face of his judges; and he, who dares commit such a crime in open court, will not boggle at a thousand in secret. *What think ye? They answered and said, He is guilty of death*, ver. 66.

Oh Caiaphas! *Has he blasphem'd?* Never man pronounced a more insolent, a more flaming blasphemy than thy self. He is Knowledge, he cannot be mistaken; he is Truth, he cannot lie; he is Sanctity, how can he blaspheme? The time will come, O priests, and Pharisees, when this pretended blasphemer, seated in majesty, waited on by legions of angels, shall pronounce a more terrible sentence upon you. Your rage can only reach his life: when he expires, your cruelty must end; but his justice will condemn you to a death that permits you to live, that you may always die, yet ever live a torment to your self, and an object of execration to heaven. When he shall examine, in the presence of men and angels, every action of your life, what will you answer? your piety will appear counterfeit, and your devotion grimace: you will confess, your zeal was envy, your fasting hypocrisy, and your gravity pride: what will this dreadful assembly answer, when ask'd, *What think ye?* He deserves, O Lord, to feel the weight of thy just anger in hell, for having outraged thy sacred Person on earth: his fury merits this punishment, his blasphemy a greater, and his insolence cannot be humbled, but by such an execution; *He is guilty of death*.

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Remember, dear reader, that thou must stand at the tribunal of him, whom thou dost see condemned at the bar of the Scribes and Pharisees; there those crimes, thou hast committed in private, will be exposed to the view of all creatures, and there is no way to avoid the sentence of death, but by passing sentence upon thy self here; and by washing out the stains of thy offences with the tears of a severe repentance. One sigh, one tear, will now extinguish those flames that an eternity will not abate hereafter.

Nature, in spite of envy and rage, has a sort of tenderness for its species, and tho' reason and justice condemn a criminal, yet instinct pities him; to insult a poor wretch on the hurdle, is inhuman; and to outrage him under the gallows, barbarous; but so soon as the sentence was pass'd upon our Saviour, all the confused rabble seem'd to have laid aside the nature of men, to take up that of furies; they broke through all the barriers of decency, moderation, and humanity, and rack'd their wits to vent their rage, ver. 67.

They made a sport of his misfortunes, and a jest of his misery; but whilst some rallied his person, others blasphemed. From words they came to blows; they struck him on the face; they spit on it, and lastly, flung a veil over his eyes, with this cruel sarcasm, *Prophecy unto us, who is he that smote thee?* Thus they even tormented themselves in inventing torments to torment him; and in the end, weariness stop'd their cruelty, not compassion. Our blessed Saviour suffered all these indignities without resistance, without complaint; nay, for the space of a whole night without intermission; rather sensible of his enemies sin, than of his own martyrdom,

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Listen, dear reader, to the voice of thy Redeemer; he calls upon all Christians, and commands them to learn, by his example, meekness, patience and humility: All these sufferings were not necessary for thy salvation; no, thy Saviour has undergone them for thy instruction: he would mark out the way to heaven by his example, as well as by his blood, and teach thee to revenge injuries with kindness, not the sword. Nor is this a mere advice; it is a strict command, and whosoever refuses to comply with it, is an apostate in practice, tho' a Christian in belief.

Oh! that all those who call themselves Christians, *i. e.* that profess his doctrine, and pretend to follow it, would really do so! what a change should we find in conversation? what a peace in families? what a calm in commerce? But alas! O dear Redeemer, thy proselytes revile thy precepts, as the Jews outraged thy person! they spit upon thy commands, and transgress them with as much freedom, as if they were persuaded with the rabble, you saw not those who offered you indignities.

They are so far from bearing a hard word with silence, that they receive it with impatience, and return insolence for pardon. A soft answer would have given you satisfaction, and imposed silence on the offender; but the anger of the one heats the passion of the other, and blows a spark into a flame: and if they are so nice in the point even of words, what wonder they never pretend to receive with meekness, or moderation, a blow? Thou hast been pleased, O God, for our sakes, to expose thy honour to calumny, thy cheeks to blows, thy face to buffets, thy back to rods, and thy head to thorns; and yet we are so extravagantly nice, that we will endure no injury without demanding

satisfaction: and what is this? we appeal to the sword's point, and expect the decision whether we shall be murdered or be murderers; and this we call satisfaction. I cannot tell what principles of honour the world has established, and by what standard men measure honour and infamy; but I am sure Christ has left different maxims; in every page of the gospel he commands us to receive blows, but never to return them. Nay, when we are struck on one cheek, we must turn the other, and bear all indignities with patience and joy: these are his instructions; these we must observe, if we pretend any right to his glory: he has indeed bought us a title to heaven by his sacred Passion, but the possession is conditional, *If we suffer with him*, Rom. viii. 17.

Our Saviour, being condemned, in the ecclesiastical court, was delivered to the secular; but, after a short examination, the judge, tho' a stranger and an infidel, saw, that his accusers envy was his only crime; and therefore he declared on the bench, in open court, *I find no fault in him*, John xix. 4, 6.

Who would not think, that, after a declaration so solemn, so publick, the innocence of our Lord should have triumph'd over the malice of his enemies? And so it had, if the Jews had been less revengeful, or the judge more courageous. But he was too guilty to protect innocence, and they too cruel to spare it. For presently the populace flew out into a fury; it pass'd from murmurs to threats, from these into a mutiny. In vain did Pilate repeat, *What evil hath he done?* Matth. xxvii. 23. I have heard your depositions, weigh'd your evidence; yet, after all, I find him rather worthy of compassion than punishment: however, this protestation, which should have ap-
peas'd

peas'd their rage, increas'd it to the extravagance of madness ; for now they gave him the choice either of condemning the prisoner at the bar, or of defending himself at Cæsar's : *If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend*, John xix. 12.

O Pilate ! let not this menace shake your constancy : tho' you forfeit the favour of your prince, you will get that of your Maker ; but if you commit a homicide, you will lose both : whosoever builds his fortune upon a crime, lays a weak foundation to uphold it. No body can be miserable that suffers for justice, nor happy that prospers by injustice.

Tho' this battery shook the governor's resolution, it did not overturn it ; he fell upon an expedient, that might (as he thought) content the Jews, yet save the prisoner : he ordered, therefore, our Lord to be scourged, that he might save him from being crucified ; and thus he committed a less crime to avoid a greater, and rather chose to torment than murder him. It is certain, the judge intended the punishment should go no farther than a gentle correction, *I will therefore chastise him, and let him go*, Luke xxiii. 16. But, by mistake, he left the execution to their direction, who had none ; and so Jesus found no more mercy than could be expected from tygers : they pierc'd his sacred body to the bones, and when they had torn it in pieces, they wounded the very wounds ; so that nothing was more unlike a man, but those, whose cruelty had brought him to so deplorable a condition.

What could fury do more ? what could envy desire more ? In appearance, rage could not invent a greater torment, than to let him live ; and therefore, had not their cruelty been merciful against their wills, here they should have broke off the tragedy,

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gedy, that he might live a miserable death, or die a most cruel life.

Oh! how true is that saying of the prophet, that the ways of God are as far above our reason, as his infinite perfections exceed our baseness! That God should love man, I wonder not; he is the work of his hands; he framed his body, and breathed into it the principle of life, his soul: that he should create him for a supernatural end, is not strange, because he is goodness; or that he should pardon his offences, because he is mercy: but that God should become man for man's sake, that he should take upon him all his misery, sin excepted, and lose his life in the midst of the most shameful and cruel torments, to free this vile, this ungrateful creature from eternal death, seems inconceivable. I comprehend not the mystery of the blessed Trinity, but I easily believe it, because reason tells me the nature of God must be incomprehensible; but for God to be scourged, and die for man, is a mystery beyond the reach of human reason. It seems unworthy of so great a Majesty to stoop so low; and altho' it shews an infinite love, it is hard to reconcile it with the wisdom of an infinite Being.

But, if we believe it, we must be as hard, as insensible, as stones, and as obdurate as devils, not to be touch'd at so inexpressible a kindness, not to die either of love or grief. One would think, that there was not in the world one man that did not love Jesus; and if such a one were found, that all mankind should regard him as a monster, should strike him out of the list of rationals, and chase him out of conversation: notwithstanding, there is found, not only one man, but a world, that neither return love, nor even compassion for all he has done, for all he has suffered, merely
for

for our sakes and interest; nay, who blaspheme his holy name with the Jews, and scourge him with the Gentiles; for whosoever transgresses his commands, in St. Paul's expression, *crucifies him afresh*. O cruelty! O ingratitude! O insensibility! the Son of God agonizes with love of me, and I disdain to vent one kind sigh! his blood flows from every vein, and I cannot (I mean) will not, drop one tear! my sins have wounded every member of his chaste body; and yet they pierce not my heart with repentance! If, before he lay in a cradle for man; before he sweated streams of blood; before he was reviled, buffeted, and scourged, he repented for having made man, Gen. vi. 6. has he not reason to repeat once more, I will exterminate the whole race of a creature so ungrateful, so stupid, that he can be neither drawn to love by favours, nor to his duty by torments?

But alas! love that nail'd him to the cross, binds his hands, and he rather pities our folly, than chastises our obstinacy: he stops at complaints, and throws before us what he has done, and suffered for our salvation, to shame us into repentance.

O man, consider, if there be any pain like mine, Lament. i. 12. and consequently any ingratitude like thine: I have done for thy sake almost all an infinite Wisdom can invent, and suffered all a human body can undergo. The time was, when thou wert not; my power drew thee from thy nothing, and my Goodness made thee a living creature: I gave thee understanding, to know me; a will assisted by grace, to love me. Scarce didst thou begin to live, but, unmindful of thy Creator, thou didst make love to all creatures, and prostitute to thy destruction all the powers of thy soul,
which

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which I gave thee as instruments of thy salvation. Having thus forfeited thy title to heaven, and posting to hell, I came upon earth, to leave you my life as a model, and my blood as a ransom; and, as if my happiness were ty'd to yours, I charged myself with all your miseries, and made you partake of all my merits: for your sake I have trembled with cold, glowed with heat, fainted with weariness: I have exposed my person to outrage, my reputation to calumnies, and my body to torments.

O my God, my Saviour, and my Redeemer! your complaint is just, and my conduct unreasonable! I deserve not the name of a child: *I am not worthy to be called thy Son*, Luke xv. 19. who have so often treated thee as an enemy; but *if I have found grace in thy fight*, Gen. xxxiii. 10. receive my tears as a pledge of my repentance. I sacrifice my heart to thy service; it shall always flame with thy love, and always hate whatsoever displeases thee: I resolve before heaven and earth, that, as I live by thy power, I will only live to thy love.

REFLECTION V.

GOSPEL of St. Matth. Chap. xxvii. Verse

3. *Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders.*

4. *Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, what is that to us? see thou to that.*

5. *And*

5. *And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.*

THE MORAL REFLECTION.

WE have seen an apostle miserable by his fall, yet happy by an unfeigned repentance. An over-weening conceit of his own strength cast him down to the bottom of the precipice; but his Master's goodness drew him out: I must now shift the scene, and represent another apostle, companion in his sin, but not in his repentance. The one denied his Master; the other betray'd him. The apostate found mercy; the traitor none. Tears convey'd the first to heaven; and despair the second to hell. God seems to have penn'd these two examples in his gospel, that the very just may fear, and the wicked not despair; that all may hope, and no body presume.

Without doubt, this once fortunate, now unhappy, apostle renounced the world with as great generosity as his companions. He possess'd indeed but little, and therefore could not leave much; yet he found some difficulty to give up his hope; which is an estate entailed on every man; and much more to lay his liberty at the foot of his Master, whose circumstances seem'd not to promise much preferment; yet providence provided him with necessities, and fervour bore the want of superfluities, not only with patience, but pleasure; so that when Christ asked him, if he wanted any thing, he frankly answer'd, Nothing. Who can possess a more valuable treasure, than he, who wants nothing, and desires no more?

Besides, our Saviour seem'd to have a peculiar consideration for his person, and so put a confidence
in

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in his integrity ; for he promoted him to the office of steward, and entrusted him with those alms he received from the charity of the faithful ; for had his Master placed him in that station out of his own motion, he had proportioned his grace to the office, and secured him either from falling, or at least from the danger of despair : but being the cause of his promotion, it was just he should be also of his ruin.

The necessity of handling money soon turned into a pleasure, and the metal, that sparkled upon his eyes, made a more agreeable impression upon his heart. However, he discharged his duty for some time with probity ; and this made him suspect, it was not so hard for a rich man to enter into heaven, as his Master pretended. In a word, he became a great advocate for the state of rich men, and pleaded for the advantages of wealth, till he had lost his innocence.

For now he began to wish he might be permitted to lay up a small peculium for age and contingencies, and, no doubt, had the confidence to ask leave, and Christ the goodness to grant it. But alas ! poor man ! he over-look'd an important point of morality ; *viz.* that passions are never quelled by an indulgent condescension ; they are a rabble that learn obedience by force, and rebellion by kindness ; the more you grant to their importunity, the more they importune ; but if you refuse them all things, they desire nothing.

This illiterate fisherman would needs commence casuist, and divine ; to appropriate (said he) a small sum can be no great sin, and probably in my circumstances none, because I am sure of leave, if bashfulness would permit me to ask it. So that he had recourse to casuistry and distinctions, and, upon a principle misunderstood, he thiev'd without scruple, and robb'd without remorse.

He

He contented himself with small fums, and supposed avarice would not cry out for greater ; but alas ! this thriving humour grew upon him ; his craving appetite called for more, and the habit of granting almost disabled his power of denying.

However, he was not so blind, but he saw his faults, and trembled at the sad consequences, if he continued in it ; he confessed, his loss would never ballance his gain, and that the devil would steal more from him, than he could possibly from his Master ; yet on the other side, he remembred, he had renounced all he possess'd for his sake, and received from his mouth a promise, confirmed with an oath, of an hundred-fold in this life, and heaven in the next ; that he came into the world to reclaim sinners, not to damn them ; why therefore should he, who was all mercy to others, be all justice and severity to him ; thus by presuming upon mercy, he multiplied his thefts, and, not doubting of pardon, never had the courage to ask it.

Unhappy man, is it not time to return to your duty, to sue for your Master's favour, which you have certainly lost ? Yes ; but alas ! he finds no inclinations to restore so soon what had cost him so dear. His eyes are dry, his heart obdurate ; he will not drop one tear, nor purpose amendment. In fine, having lost God's grace, he hath bid adieu to shame, and turn'd off conscience together with his duty. One sin leads to another, and the second is generally more heinous than the first ; avarice, it seems, was his darling sin. When once we are too eagerly bent upon a thing, we seldom formalize upon the means ; he had gathered a small stock by theft ; he resolved now to make his fortune at one blow by treason.

He

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He knew, the priests meditated our Saviour's ruin, and only expected an opportunity ; he offered his service ; they promised fair ; but he soon perceived their avarice equalled their cruelty, and tho' they were bent upon revenge, they resolved to buy the satisfaction at a cheap rate. In conclusion, they offered thirty pieces of silver ; a despicable price for so great a crime. This unexpected proposal flung the poor man into strange convulsions ; the smallness of the recompence disgusted him, and the foulness of his treason struck him with horror ; he trembled to go on, and blush'd to retreat : above he saw heaven lost ; below hell ready to revenge his perfidy ; yet all these spectres were unable to fright him into repentance, so that he accepted the offer, and jump'd down a precipice ; from which his Master declared he should never return.

Scarce had he received the reward of his sin, when the divine justice laid hold of the criminal ; a short time past between the guilt and the punishment : for no sooner had he heard sentence of death pronounced upon his Master, but he condemned himself as the complice of the murder. Oh ! then he began to wish he never had been so happy as to have known him, or so unfortunate as to have betray'd him. All his former sins now arose against him, and he, who before was so insensible as not to feel them, was now unable to endure them ; he felt, by experience, silver was no cure for a wounded conscience, and so hated the price of this sin, as the sole cause of his torment : fain would he find some remedy, but could not resolve upon the choice of the physician. Sometimes he had thoughts of casting himself at his Master's feet, but pride dissuaded him from so humble a posture ; and, as before his mercy encouraged him to sin, so now his justice deterred him from asking forgiveness. Conducted therefore by
his

his evil genius, he address'd himself to the priests, and beg'd comfort of those, who had given him the occasion to make the petition.

He acknowledg'd his fault; he return'd the price of his treason: in fine, his repentance seem'd sincere, seeing he had sorrow at his heart, confession in his mouth, and restitution in his hands. But these impious pastors, who might have read the heinousness of their own crime in the torment of his, instead of moderating his sorrow, turned it into despair. Oh the force of passion and envy! *What is it to us?* I fear, miserable creatures! his crime concerns you, and that you share in the punishment, as well as in the treason. Is it a sin to permit one? and none to persuade one, none to buy one?

Ah poor Judas! these are those, whose favour you courted at the expence of conscience; whose kindness you bought at the price of heaven. See how they abandon you in your grief, and scorn you in your misfortune; instead of mollifying your wound, they fret it by their unconcern; and having drawn you into sin, they throw you into despair.

This unhappy sinner, meeting with no comfort from the priests, had some thoughts of laying open the sad condition of his soul before his betray'd Master: he knew his goodness, and had some confidence in his mercy; but the devil, who possess'd him, put an obstacle in his way, and hindred the execution of the design that had infallibly saved him. He express'd to the life the horror of his crime, with a thousand aggravating circumstances. He told him, he had misused his Master's past graces to such a degree, that it was impudence to expect any for the future: that he was just, tho' merciful; and no less prone to punish vice, than to reward virtue: Therefore *curse God, and die*; your

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disease is mortal ; death is the only cure ; this will put an end to your misery ; when you cannot hope for pardon, 'tis time to despair.

But why, foolish man, do you sink into despair? To despair of mercy, is to assure your misery ; and to despair of pardon, to incapacitate you to receive it. You lose nothing at least by asking, but you forfeit all by remaining impenitent. Did not Jesus call you friend in the very height of your treason? Will he receive you less favourably in the height of your sorrow? A contrite heart disarms his justice, and turns his severity into mercy: sue then for pardon; Christ will forget your sin, if you will remember your duty.

But all these considerations were unable to raise one spark of hope in his dejected soul ; so that now he found no other remedy for his misfortune, but to apply none ; and to put himself in such a state, as to be out of a capacity of applying any. He resolved therefore to end his torture by flinging himself upon an eternal one ; and so placed all his hope in despair. As living he hung between hope and despair, so dying he hung betwixt hell and heaven ; till at length he breathed out his unhappy soul, dy'd with the sin of theft, and treason, and despair.

Thus dy'd poor Judas ; his own conscience condemned him, and his own hands executed the fatal sentence, and thus he damned himself, before God pronounced the sentence upon him. Had he not presum'd on his mercy before this sin, probably he would not have fallen ; and had he not represented God as too severe, after his misfortune, he had not despaired. Let us rather keep his justice in our eye before we fall, and consider only his mercy after it ; that will withdraw us from sin, and this will animate us to sue for pardon.

And

And now, Christian reader, examine a little by what steps this poor creature fell, from the dignity of an apostle, into the infamy of a traitor, and the state of a reprobate.

REFLECTION VI.

GOSPEL of St. Matth. Chap. xxvii. Verse

15. *Now at that feast the governor was wont to release unto the people a prisoner, whom they would.*

16. *And they had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas.*

17. *Therefore when they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus, which is called Christ?*

18. *For he knew that for envy they had delivered him.*

19. *When he was sat down on the judgment-seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream, because of him.*

20. *But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus.*

21. *The governor answered and said unto them, Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you? They said, Barabbas.*

22. *Pilate said unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus, which is called Christ? They all say unto him, Let him be crucified.*

23. *And the governor said, Why, what evil hath he done? But they cried out the more, saying, Let him be crucified.*

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24. *When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person : see ye to it.*

25. *Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children.*

26. *Then released he Barabbas unto them ; and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.*

THE MORAL REFLECTION.

PILATE had a great mind to satisfy the Jews, and yet not to wound his conscience ; he knew that an exasperated mob is capable of any thing but moderation ; and that those, who forged crimes to ruin our Saviour, would certainly charge him with real ones ; so that he study'd how to save his conscience, without losing his fortune ; and he thought he had fallen on a method, by impowering the Jews to judge the prisoner by their own laws.

But the Jews were resolved to enjoy their revenge, without the infamy of procuring it ; and therefore they protested, their conscience and religion forbid them to condemn any man : *It is not lawful for us to put any man to death, John xviii.*

31. O hypocrisy ! O madness ! do you think the guilt of a Pagan will make you innocent ? If it is a murder to condemn the innocent, is it none to bribe witnesses ? to pack the jury ? to force the judge by clamour and menaces ?

Tho' envy may bias reason, it cannot blind it : they knew well enough, that it was no less a sin to execute an innocent person by the hands of a hangman, than their own ; but they refused to condemn

damn our Lord, that he might appear more guilty : for the more they shew'd themselves averse from shedding his blood, the less would they be suspected of partiality, and no body would judge such nice consciences capable of homicide. They commanded therefore Pilate to do his office, and to free the emperor of a rival, and the synagogue of an impostor.

Pilate now learnt by experience, that the populace is a beast, not to be tamed by kindness, but severity ; that it takes the confidence to ask from your easiness in granting : he wish'd he had not been so weak, as to order our Saviour to be scourged ; or not so scrupulous, as to hinder him from being crucify'd : for he saw no way left to secure his fortune, but by wounding his conscience, and dying his hands in the blood of an innocent.

However, the poor infidel made his last effort to save our Redeemer, without offending his persecutors. It was a custom, in honour of the feast of the passover, to free a prisoner, at the choice of the Jews : he had in custody a notorious criminal, called Barabbas, guilty of theft and murder. He supposed this fellow's crimes were so enormous, that they render'd him not only unworthy of mercy, but even of compassion : for he was not only a thief, but a captain of high-way-men ; a notorious factious spirit, guilty of riot and murder : in fine, by birth obscure, by profession a rake, in practice a compleat villain, a nuisance to his country, and a shame to the age he lived in.

As there was no comparison between the persons of Christ and Barabbas, Pilate thought there could be no debate about the choice, and that, in these circumstances, envy would give place to justice ; but the proposition was no sooner made, but they all cried out, *Release Barabbas, and execute Jesus ;*

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that is, let the malefactor live, and the immortal die.

But thou, O my Soul, whose releasement dost thou desire? Of Barabbas, or of Jesus? Thy compassion, without doubt, would deliver Jesus; but thy sins cry louder, *Let him be crucified!* O eternal Father, whom do you absolve, the homicide, or your Son? Your mercy commands your justice to free Barabbas, and to condemn Jesus! To save a wretched slave, you crucify your Son? nay you, my Saviour, demand, with earnestness, the deliverance of a robber: to redeem me, you will sacrifice yourself, and die on a cross, that I may live eternally in heaven. You are therefore, O Jesus! doom'd to die by the voices of heaven and earth, by the justice of your Father, by the obedience you owe him, and by the love you bare us.

It is certain, never did envy appear more violent, never injustice more barefac'd; never choice more unreasonable, than in the preference of Barabbas to Jesus: nor can this passage be read without horror and amazement; yet it is certain also, that many, at least, who were instrumental to the death of our Saviour, and preferr'd a thief before him, were not guilty of Deicide, tho' of murder. Had they known his Divinity as clearly as his innocence, they would not have postpon'd him to Barabbas, much less wou'd they have crucify'd him.

Yet how many Christians, who believe he is God, and adore him, and hope to be saved by his merits, and fear to be damned by the rigour of his justice, prefer Barabbas, nay, things ten times more vile, more execrable? This may seem a paradox, tho' it is most true, and (did not plain fact prove it to evidence) incredible. When you are tempted to transgress those laws Christ has imposed

posed upon you, and obliges you to observe, under pain of forfeiting his friendship, and your title to heaven, if once you come to waver between the unlawful pleasure offered and your duty, you ballance between Christ and Barabbas: but, if you leave his commands, to embrace the suggestions of sensuality, you chuse, as effectually as the Jews did, Barabbas before Jesus. For, you can't be a friend to Christ, and an enemy to his precepts; a transgressor of his commands, and a favourer of his person: if therefore you postpone his favour to an unlawful satisfaction of sense, you cry as loud as the Jews, *Not this man, but Barabbas.*

And how many Christians are guilty of this unreasonable conduct? Nay, how few are innocent? Take one transient view of the world, and you will find, the greatest part of mankind prefer those things that are pleasing to sense, before those that are agreeable to reason; temporal enjoyments, before celestial; a moment of pleasure, before an eternity of happiness. St. Paul tells us in plain terms, that neither the avaricious, nor the impure, shall possess the kingdom of God and Christ; and yet this terrible menace is unable to extinguish the thirst of the former, or the heat of the concupiscence of the latter: those will build a fortune on the ruins of their consciences; these will continue in the embraces of a creature more impudent, as well as more infamous, than a Barabbas. All of them chuse a thief and a murderer before Jesus: *Not this man, but Barabbas*, John xviii. 40.

Let us then, dear reader, cease to accuse the Jews, and arraign our own conduct: ignorance may plead in their defence, but not in ours. We know we cannot serve two masters, the world and Jesus: this we must condemn, if we free the other; and one we must chuse, both we cannot. We know,

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we cannot be happy without Jesus, nor miserable with him: And yet, as if we were resolved at the same time to renounce reason, as well as grace, do we not abandon Jesus, and strike in with his enemy? Do we not prefer the pleasures of a moment before the joys of eternity? Is not this choice as disrespectful, as contemptuous, to our blessed Saviour, as that of the Jews, *Not this man, but Barabbas?*

REFLECTION VII.

GOSPEL of St. Matth. Chap. xxvii. Verse

27. *Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers.*

28. *And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe.*

29. *And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail king of the Jews.*

30. *And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head.*

31. *And after that they mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him.*

32. *And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to bear his cross.*

33. *And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, a place of a skull,*

34. *They gave him vinegar to drink, mingled with gall, and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink.*

35. *And*

35. *And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots : that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots.*

36. *And sitting down, they watched him there :*

37. *And set up over his head, his accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.*

38. *Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left.*

39. *And they that passed by, reviled him, wagging their heads,*

40. *And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thy self : if thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.*

41. *Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said,*

42. *He saved others, himself he cannot save : if he be the king of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him.*

43. *He trusted in God ; let him deliver him now if he will have him : for he said, I am the Son of God.*

44. *The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth.*

45. *Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour.*

46. *And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani ? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me ?*

47. *Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, This man calleth for Elias.*

48. *And*

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48. *And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink.*

49. *The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him.*

50. *Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost.*

On the CRUCIFIXION.

PILATE, in spite of all the accusations, charged upon our blessed Saviour, declared him innocent; *I find no cause of death in him*; and at the same time protested he would have no hand in the murder: yet, oh weakness! oh inconstancy of man! with the same breath he acquitted and condemned him. Such a power had the fear of Cæsar usurp'd over this governor's conscience, such an ascendant the love of his fortune over that of his soul.

Innocents (I know) have often suffered the punishments only due to criminals; but then they were condemned as malefactors: the most bloody tyrants always feigned some crime, when they found none; but, to declare a man innocent, and yet condemn him, is a shame to human nature. Matth. xxvii. 26.

Cicero assures us, the death of the cross was the most vile of all others: Livy, the most dishonourable and ignominious: and St. Austin, "That among all the different kinds of death, there is none worse." Yet the enraged Jews thought the most cruel death too mild, the most infamous too honourable, unless accompanied by the most aggravating circumstances of pain and ignominy: they forced him to carry the instruments of execution, against both law and precedent; but when
his

his sacred body, weakned by the bloody sweat, exhausted by the violence of the scourges, and wearied by a thousand infolencies, sunk under the burthen, they obliged Simeon to ease him; not out of a motive of charity or compassion, but of cruelty; for they feared he would expire before he felt the points of the nails, and all the torments of his crucifixion; and so they suffered him to recover some strength, that he might be more capable to suffer: if the weight of our sins could cast the innocent upon the ground, where will they plunge the guilty? if the most holy could not bear our guilt, who will be able to endure the punishment?

He is now come to Calvary; and here, dear reader, we shall behold an astonishing spectacle; not a God shining in flames on Horeb, nor surrounded with thunder and lightning on Sinai, nor sparkling with glory on Tabor; but a God crucified, a God hanging on a cross in the middle of thieves, pierced with nails, crowned with thorns, insulted by the rabble, tormented by the soldiers, and rallied by the priests; and, what is yet more strange, dying for his creatures, even those, who murdered him by their false accusations, and tormented him with their own hands, Isa. liii. 1. O faith! what do you teach, what do you oblige me to believe, and threaten me with eternal torments if I do not? I know, no man is so happy, but by a turn of fortune he may become miserable: no man so beautiful, but torments may render him loathsome and deformed: no man so healthy, but once must die: but oh! that God, who is sovereignly and essentially happy, should fall into the depth of misery; that he, whose beauty draws the admiration of the very angels, 1 Pet. i. 12. should become so deformed, that his very enemies cannot behold

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behold him without horror ; that he, who gives life and being to all things, should die, and by the hands of those, who live by his power ! this is so strange, so far above all the lights we receive from reason, that faith alone can persuade us it is true. O stupendous love ! that God should do more for human nature, than nature can comprehend or even believe ; and yet more stupendous ! that all these testimonies of love, that soften rocks, that melt stones, that call the admiring dead from their graves, and frighten day into night, should make no impression upon man, should draw no tears of compassion, no return of gratitude ! nay, that, as far as lies in him, he should act over again the same tragedy, renew his torments, mock him by his oaths, and crucify him by his vices, *They crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh*, Heb. vi. 6.

And now they prepare the last act of this bloody tragedy, and, to add confusion to pain, they strip him to the skin, and expose him naked to the eyes of the petulant multitude : what a confusion to our chaste Saviour, to see himself lie open to a million of spectators, who laugh at his blushes, and sport at his confusion. But he would undergo this shame, to make us blush to offend him, or at least, to be ashamed not immediately to ask forgiveness. He would cover our nakedness with his, and the opprobrious prospect of our shameful abominations with his own confusion ; he would purchase, by his nudity, robes of glory for our resuscitated bodies, and place them in heaven, where cloaths are no ornament, and nakedness no infamy.

But then we must put off the old man, Col. iii. 9. tear off our criminal passions, and throw off those chains that incumber and tie us to the world,

world, and fasten our hearts to sensual objects ; for we must put on Christ, to appropriate his merits, Rom. xiii. 14. that is, we must invest our souls with his grace, espouse his sentiments, obey his commands, and imitate his life, to partake of the benefit of his most sacred death.

'This first scene of the last act gives us a prospect of the Jews inhumanity, the second of their rage and cruelty : here you will see the executioners, arm'd with hammers and nails ; these pierce his sacred hands and feet ; they open his veins, tear his arteries ; the remainder of his blood purples the cross, and the loss casts him into convulsions ; the pain is violent, and the delicacy of his constitution redoubles the torment. Oh dear Jesus ! drive these nails into our hearts, that the instruments of thy grief may be the cause of our sorrow ; and, if they cannot fetch out blood, at least let them force out tears of compassion for thy sufferings, and of detestation of our offences.

Let the noise of those hammers awake all Christians that crucify thee, and let those, who will not hear the voice of thy precepts, be stunned at the noise of thy torments ; which preach love, and upbraid their ingratitude. Oh happy those, who nail their unruly passions to thy cross, who bathe the sores of their wounded consciences in thy blood, and bury their sins in thy wounds, open to receive them !

Stretch'd out on the cross, weltering in his blood, crowned with thorns, bruised with buffets, torn with whips, he is raised on high, and (to augment the ignominy of his sufferings) placed between thieves, that the spectators may be persuaded, their crimes are as equal as their punishments, and their lives as infamous as their deaths : now is fulfilled,
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what the prophet had so long before foretold, *Thy life shall hang in doubt before thee*, Deut. xxviii. 66. for on this gibbet hangs the Redeemer of the world, nailed and crucified; our life dies to subdue death, and, to procure us life everlasting, he lays down his own.

O! how true is that sentence of Solomon, *Love is strong as death*, Cant. viii. 6. Thy love, O God, is even stronger than death, than hell, than heaven, earth, men, devils, and angels, nay, in some manner, than God himself; this alone disarmed him of his justice, and persuaded you to pardon those rebels, whose disobedience cried aloud for vengeance: this confined your Immensity to the womb of a virgin, your Majesty to a stable, your Impassibility to a passible body; this fettered you in the garden, nailed you to a cross on Calvary, and (if I may so say) forced you to expire on that shameful and dolorous instrument of execution.

Yet, methinks, man's stupidity and insensibility seems greater; seeing all you have done, all you have suffered for his sake, is not able to soften his hard heart, to wring out one tear of compassion, or to force the return of a bare acknowledgment for the favour. He knows, O God, you did die for his sins, and yet he commits new offences without scruple, without remorse: nay, he takes occasion, from your goodness, to offend with impunity, and persuades himself, he is innocent, because you have paid his debts, and suffered the pain due to his guilt. I remember, you were pleased to say, *And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me*, John xii. 32. You are now exalted, O dear Redeemer, as high as the rage of your enemies, or your own charity, can raise you; draw my heart to you with those cords that

that tied thee in the garden, with those scourges that martyr'd thee at the pillar, and pierce my heart with those nails that fastened thee to the cross.

Yet had our Lord found any pity, any compassion, he had at least not wanted all comfort ; but alas ! *I looked for some to have pity on me, but there was no man ; neither found I any to comfort me*, Psal. lxxix. 21. His dear disciples fled ; one denied him, another betrayed him, and all abandoned him in this extremity. Some women indeed overcame the weakness of their sex, and, on this occasion, their love was stronger than their fear ; yet they stood at a distance, and wanting force to defend his life, they drop'd tears to deplore his death ; but blasphemies drowned the noise of their sighs.

The Jews had rack'd their brains to invent torments, to torture our Saviour's body ; but, being at a nonplus to find more, they sharpen their tongues, and dart raileries at his reputation, and blasphemies against his Person. Men are generally tired at length even with the most pleasing vices : cruelty and revenge have their bounds, as well as the sea ; and, when it has flow'd to the highest point, it naturally retires ; but that of the Jews was unusual and unprecedented ; the more it tortured our blessed Lord, the more it studied to torture him ; his blood could not quench their rage, nor even his death their fury, unless accompanied with most bitter scoffs, and most flaming blasphemies.

Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thy self ; if thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross, Matth. xxvii. 40. Your selves, O Jews, destroy the temple of God, by murdering his body, the living temple of the
Divinity :

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Divinity: but within three days his power will repair the ruins of your rage; and rebuild it more glorious at his resurrection: you tempt him to save himself, and mistake his love for impotence; but if he saves himself, you are all undone; his misery is your happiness; his infamy your glory; and his death your life.

You bid him come down if he be the Son of God, and he ascended, because he is. Obedience to his Father fastened him to the cross, not your nails; by this mark of infamy he will publish his glory, and manifest his power, by drawing all the world to acknowledge his Divinity.

These blasphemous taunts deserved a thunderbolt; but our Saviour's prayer stop'd his Father's justice; it pierc'd the heavens swifter than the Jews malice, and pleaded harder for pardon, than their crimes for revenge: *Father forgive them; for they know not what they do*, Luke xxiii. 34. Let either your goodness forgive them, or my prayer obtain their pardon; and, if this will not move you to mercy, behold my blood shed indeed by them, but by your own command poured out for them. Alas! passion blinds them; they neither see my Innocence they torture, nor my Divinity they blaspheme, nor thy Justice they provoke; *they know not what they do*.

Here is the practice of that great precept he so severely laid upon all his followers, and recommended so earnestly, *Love your enemies*, return good for evil, and prayers for calumnies; never was innocence greater on the one side, nor outrage more unjust on the other, and yet he not only solicits their pardon, but makes an apology for their crimes; *they know not what they do*. Could we but learn to excuse our neighbours, we shall easily forgive all the affronts they offer us; but we look
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upon them through magnifying glasses ; our imagination swells a moat into a beam, the effect of inconsiderateness into a design, and of mere oversight into a premeditated malice ; and thus, by aggravating the injury, we augment the difficulty of pardoning it ; we turn enemies to our own repose, traitors to our consciences, and so, no less imprudently than unchristianly, revenge on our souls the injuries done our persons. Follow not therefore the impulse of resentment and passion, but the example of your dying Master, and, if you cannot excuse an offending neighbour, pardon him.

And now our Saviour's end drew near ; his strength failed ; he fell into convulsions, and then, gathering all his wasted spirits, he cried out, *It is finished, and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost*, John xix. 30. I have fulfilled all my Father's commands ; the prophecies are come to pass ; the figures end together with the law ; my Father is appeased, his justice satisfied ; man is reconciled, and his redemption compleat ; *It is finished.*

Happy, nay, thrice happy is that man, who, on his death-bed, can say, *It is finished* ; I have answered the end of my creation. I have kept the fidelity I owe to God, and the charity due to my neighbour ; his life has been the rule of mine, his commands the model of my actions, and his love the only object of mine ; and now I expect nothing but my reward.

At length, men having lost all feeling, the very stones became sensible, and, tho' they could not weep, they split for sorrow ; the sun put on mourning ; the sepulchres flew open, and all the elements fell into an agony. But O what wonder !

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nature must needs be sick, when God can die ;
and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.

Here is that miracle, that prodigy of love, God has wrought for man ; nothing but his infinite charity could work it, nothing but his grace can persuade us he has wrought it. But what return do we make for this superlative mercy ? how do we answer the favour ? He pawned his life, when we were his enemies, and restored us to liberty at the expence of his blood, when we groaned under all the miseries of slavery ; the death, he suffered for us, obliges us to die for him, and yet for his sake we refuse to die to sin. Alas ! we fear to mortify one single passion ; what likelihood of dying to it ? how can we give him our lives, who refuse even to present him our heart ? Oh ! what love God bears to man ; but oh the ingratitude of man to his Creator ! God died for our Redemption, and we refuse to love our Redeemer.

THOU hast read, dear Christian, what Christ has done for thy sake, and what he has suffered ; it now remains to ask thee, what thou wilt do for him : so much love on his side requires a reciprocal return on thine ; gratitude calls for love, and, what is more, thy interest commands it. If you consecrated to his service all you possess, and every member of your body, you would not give enough ; but he only asks your heart, *My son, give me thine heart*, Prov. xxiii. 26. and can you, nay, dare you refuse him so small a present ? He has carried his love to the height : to die for a friend, is the most man can do ; but Christ has out-done even this ; for he laid down his life for his

his enemies, and redeem'd them from eternal slavery, not with money, but with his most precious blood.

Did a slave redeem his master's life by the loss of his own, would not he love his person, cherish his memory, and extend his kindness to his relations ; and would not all the world look upon him as a shame to human nature, as a prodigy of ingratitude, as a monster of cruelty, if he contemn'd the favour, or insulted over the dead carcase ? yet what comparison between the persons of crucified Jesus, and a dying slave ; between the benefits bestow'd upon all mankind by the death of the one, and those on a master by the death of the other ?

Jesus Christ was God, and therefore the excellence of his person was infinite ; this puts an infinite value upon every action he has done for us, upon every torment he has suffered for us : there is by consequence infinitely more distance between his life and that of the greatest monarch, than between that of a prince and the vilest insect. For in short, between things infinite and finite there is no comparison, no proportion : yet this dreadful Majesty has loved thee to such an excess, that he has breathed out his soul for thee upon the most infamous instrument of death, the cross, after he had suffered all the calumnies and reproaches malice could invent, and all the torments rage could inflict.

And yet at the same time you were, dear reader, his mortal enemy ; you were conceived in sin, and lived in opposition to all his commands ; you had abused his favours, and prostituted every member to his dishonour. Nay, he foresaw you would misuse his Passion, and contemn his grace, the fruit of his sufferings ; notwithstanding all this,

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this great, this infinite Being (so astonishing was his love) would die for poor wretched man ; he had no prospect, no interest, but our salvation: he was happy before we were, and would be so, tho' we vanish'd into nothing. Nay, his glory would not increase by our felicity, nor his happiness decrease by our misery ; he would reign in heaven, tho' all mankind groan'd in hell. Besides, he has by his death revers'd the sentence of damnation pronounced against us ; he has reinstated us in his Father's favour, and rais'd us, from an eternal death, to a life, not fleet and transitory, but everlasting, replenish'd with all happiness we can desire ; nor has he only bought us a bare title, but furnishes us with means to enter into possession of it : so that we cannot miscarry, unless we betray our own concerns, and turn traitors to our selves, as well as to him.

What man can do so much for his friend ? and how almost could God do more ? After so authentic, so stupendous testimonies of his love, can we find in our hearts to make no return of kindness ? We, I say, who have nothing great but our sins, nothing estimable but the love, God our Creator, and our Redeemer, bears us. Benefits oblige lions and tygers, and soften the hearts of the most savage monsters ; shall man, who has a natural bent to love, and both reason and grace to guide it, so far discard himself, not only of humanity, but even sense, as to be more hard-hearted than brutes ? It is not without reason, that St. Bernard introduces God complaining of so barbarous, so brutal an usage : " What is the reason, " my Christian people, that you rather chuse to " serve my enemy, and your own, than me ? " Did his Power create you ? does his Goodness preserve you ? did his Love redeem you ? has he
been

been reviled, buffeted, crowned with thorns, nailed to a cross, for your sakes? You are the work of my hands, the price of my blood, and the object of my love; return therefore to me. If my love cannot extort this compliance, let your interest at least effect it; heaven will be the reward of your affection, and hell the just punishment of your ingratitude; you cannot therefore love yourself without loving me.

O dear Saviour! words are superfluous motives, when actions speak so loud, and those hard hearts, that cannot be softened by what you have done, will not be won by all you can say: we know we are bound to love thee, O Redeemer! and wish every member were turned into a tongue to praise thy goodness, or into a heart to love thy mercy. *If any man love not our Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema,* 1 Cor. xvi. 22. If there be found a man so ill-natured as not to love thee, O dear Jesus! let him be degraded from the dignity of a rational creature, and thrown among the beasts; let him be banished human society, and condemned to the company of bears and tygers; nay, let him take up with the furies, and be tormented with the devils, *if he love not our Lord Jesus Christ.*

But, dear reader, mistake not, by fancying thou lovest our Saviour, because the consideration of the torments he suffered for thy sake wrings out sometimes tears of compassion. Tears are often a mark of a moist brain, or a soft nature, not of love: a man must be made of steel, not to melt into pity at the sight even of a criminal upon the rack, altho' we hate his villainies, and are unacquainted with his person; not love, but nature, raises this commiseration. Our love must be brought to the rule set down by our Saviour, before we can be

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ascertained it is real and sincere, *If ye love me, keep my commandments.* This is the trial, this is the test of that love Christ requires ; this alone distinguishes true love from adulterate, and the operations of nature from those of grace.

Examine your conduct by this rule ; run over his commands ; and then you may frame a judgment whether you have made over your heart to him, or to his enemies. If you take not his holy name in vain ; if you neither invade your neighbour's goods, nor attempt upon his fame ; if you defile not your bodies with impurity, nor your thoughts with unlawful desires ; if scoffs cannot shame you from his religion, nor any motive of interest inveigle you out of conscience ; if, in a word, you are ready to displease all creatures, rather than displease God, and postpone their friendship to his ; you may then without solicitude persuade your selves you love your Redeemer, and partake of the fruits of his Passion. *If ye love me, keep my commandments,* John xiv. 15.

But, if you transgress his law, and contemn his maxims, to live by those of the world, whom he terms his enemies, and has so often and so solemnly cursed with a *Woe to the world*, in his gospel ; it is then certain you are far from him. The observance of his commands is the test of love ; *If a man love me, he will keep my word,* John xiv. 23. So that, tho' you melt into tears at the recital of his sufferings, and cry out a thousand times, *My God, and my all* ; all this is nothing but a cheat and imposture, or rather a natural impression that shews something of the man remains, tho' nothing of the Christian. Deeds are the standard of love, not words : we may praise him we hate, and disrespect him we admire ; nay, and court one this moment, we intend to murder the
next.

next. But when we fall in with a neighbour's inclination, when we comply not only with his commands, but meet his very desires; when we wed his maxims, and copy his conduct; when we dislike what he disapproves, and approve what he likes; then we truly love him; and this task Christ imposes upon his profelytes, and we must discharge this duty, if we intend to share his friendship here, and his glory hereafter.

And now, my dear Saviour, what is this to all the favours you have heap'd upon me? Were I only indebted to you for my creation, how could I return a sufficient acknowledgment for the benefit? All I possess even upon this account is yours, and to you I owe all my actions, as a just tribute of my dependance, and your dominion; but alas! I am yours by a hundred other titles; I was sick to death, you healed me; in prison, you set me at liberty; in bondage, you redeemed me; a child of Satan, by adoption you raised me to the dignity of son of the most High; heir of hell, you gave me a right to heaven. Take then, O God, my heart, and mould it to thy will, not my own! take down its pride, and teach it humility, meekness, and patience, and all those virtues thou hast consecrated by practice, and canonized by thy example. Let it place all honour in infamy, all pleasure in suffering, all wealth in poverty, and all its glory in thy cross. *God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, Galat. vi. 14.*

I. EPISTLE to the Corinthians, Chap. v. Verse

6. *Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?*

7. *Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us.*

8. *Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.*

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A Scandal, that happened in the church of Corinth, coming to the knowledge of St. Paul, he exerts his zeal against the crime, and the whole Church, for suffering the criminal to go unpunished: I hear, says he, there is found among you a man, who, abusing the wife of his father, lives openly in a fornication unknown to the very idolaters, and detested by the most vicious; and yet you converse with this incestuous person; and, what is strange, boast of your virtue, when you ought to deplore his sin, and break off all commerce with so scandalous a sinner.

Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? That one man, that lives ill, is capable, by bad example, to draw into disorders many that live well? If therefore you intend to keep clear of the contagion, *Purge out the old leaven*; banish the incestuous from your society; for your profession obliges you to be without *leaven*, that is, without sin, *that ye may be a new lump.*

The Jews could not eat the paschal-lamb but with unleavened bread; but, seeing this was only a figure of Jesus Christ, who gives himself, in the

the new banquet to which we are invited, and that the life of Christians is a continual feast, and more noble than the Jewish passover; let us cleanse our hearts from their ancient irregularities, and, instead of malice and fraud, let us for the future lodge there innocence and virtue. *Let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.*

In short, the drift of St. Paul is to stir up the Corinthians zeal against the scandal, to caution them against all familiarity, or even commerce, with so profligate a wretch; lest by communication they should catch the evil, and suffer in their virtue, and the whole congregation should draw upon their own heads the divine vengeance, for their sinful connivance and toleration.

Purge out the old leaven, that is, purge your hearts from their former crimes by a sincere repentance, and enrich your souls with all those virtues that are suitable to your profession.

I will at present leave the literal sense of the apostle, and make use of the words, to instruct Christians in the duty of *keeping the sacramental feast*, or receiving *the Lord's Supper*.

In the infancy of the Church, there was no necessity of obliging the faithful, by precept, to receive the holy communion; the blood of our Saviour was then warm, and heated the zeal of his followers; they wanted rather a curb to keep in their devotion, than a spur to enliven it; they were so far from contenting themselves with an annual or monthly communion, that they met every day to *break bread*; but, in process of time, their charity cool'd, and their fervour gave place to lukewarmness; their daily communions were laid aside, and two, one at Easter, and the other at Whitsuntide, satisfied their devotion.

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But as their piety grew less, so their communions became less frequent; so that at length they fell almost into a total neglect of the sacrament: the usage was confined to the devotion of a few; the generality of Christians refrain'd whole years from the holy table; and altho' some covered their neglect with the specious pretence of respect, yet indevotion, or rather forgetfulness of their salvation, was the real cause of their negligence. To prevent this inconvenience, the church has laid a precept on all her children to communicate at least three times in a year, of which Easter to be one: First, Because then Christ was pleased to institute this great sacrament; and, at his departure out of this world, to leave it as a pledge of his kindness, and a perpetual memorial of his passion. Secondly, That we might rise at the same time from the state of sin to that of grace, that our Saviour arose from death to life, and so, by a spiritual resurrection to grace, accompany his real and corporeal resurrection to glory: in a word, she has commanded these stated communions, that her children may not be permitted to lay aside all practice of religion; and certainly those, who wholly absent themselves from this great duty, are not far from taking their farewell of all religion.

Some have thought, that even an unworthy communion satisfies the command of the church; but she has declared authentically, that those, who eat and drink the body and blood of Christ unworthily, eat and drink their own damnation. Her intention, in obliging her children to this duty, was as it were to force them, at least, three times in the year to reconcile themselves to their Creator; and that the grace, receiv'd by this sacrament, might enable them to continue in this good disposition. If then any are so unfortunate as to approach the holy table
with

with a polluted heart, to avoid the censures of the church, or the dis-esteem of men, such must return with a due preparation, *i. e.* with a hearty sorrow for all their Sins, and a firm purpose of amendment.

Certainly we cannot make too great preparation for the reception of the sacrament, seeing damnation is threaten'd to those, who receive it unworthily, and life everlasting promised to those, who receive it worthily.

The essential disposition therefore to receive the fruits of this sacrament, is the state of grace; but this is not all; we must approach with a lively faith and an inflamed love, with a heart detach'd from all inclinations to the least sin; for, as our Saviour has given himself entirely to us, so we must consecrate every part of our body, every faculty of our soul, wholly to his service.

Cry out with the centurion, *Lord, I am not worthy, that thou shouldst come under my roof*, Matth. viii. 8. I know my unworthiness, and nothing but thy pressing invitation emboldens me to come to the holy banquet thy love has prepared. I rely upon no deserts of my own, but solely upon thy goodness. My desire is to obey thy orders, to accomplish thy designs, and to die to the world and all its deceiving vanities. These humble sentiments move God's goodness, and excite him to liberality; to think ourselves worthy of his favour, is to deserve none; but God seldom fails to impart abundant graces to those, who pretend no other title to them but his bounty.

Think what return you can make God for this inestimable benefit, how you can contribute to the increase of his service, to the augmentation of his glory; if you find an attachment to any thing that may endanger your virtue, or cool your zeal, sacrifice

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crifice it to his love ; and tho' you cannot kill the passion, you may abate the excess, and force it within the bounds of reason. Not only make his name known to your domesticks, but his law : and take care (as much as you can) they practise what they believe, and serve their Maker, with the same fidelity they serve you : when you take care of God's concerns, he never forgets yours.

But the receiving the communion at these stated times only, tho' it complies with the precept of the church, does not satisfy the duty of a Christian ; and I am persuaded we have the misfortune to see so many disorders, because we see so few communicants. When a man lives the whole year in a supine negligence of all that relates to his salvation, when he seldom implores God's grace in his prayers, and daily provokes vengeance by his sins ; how can we think he is so prepared at Easter, as to receive such a provision of grace, as will influence his conduct the year following, as will remove all obstacles to virtue, all allurements to vice ?

Some pretend, tho' they lead Christian lives, that they find themselves unworthy to frequent the sacrament, that they want the perfection requisite to approach with fruit this holy table ; that this action demands the purity of an angel, the transports of a seraph, and the perfection of a cherub ; that it is better to abstain with reverence and respect, than to receive often with lukewarmness. And, upon this pretext, they content themselves with two or three communions in the year, and make it a considerable part of their devotion to censure those, whose piety calls oftner upon them to receive.

But, first, if we consider our indigence and necessity, we should communicate every day. Our souls want their food, as well as our bodies ; and Christ has instituted this sacrament for our spiritual nourishment.

nourishment. For this reason he so often invites us to eat his flesh, and drink his blood; nay, and commands us to do it under pain of damnation. He has appointed the symbols of bread and wine, to teach us, that it is as necessary for the support of our spiritual life, as food for our corporeal.

Secondly, Those, who demand a perfect sanctity, are in a great mistake, and whilst they pretend to honour the sacrament, they dishonour it, by rendering it unnecessary and unprofitable: for, if I must be a saint before I receive, to what purpose do I receive? God commands us *to be perfect*, Matth. v. 48. and has instituted this sacrament as a means to attain the sanctity and perfection he requires; now if it be a means to sanctity, it cannot presuppose sanctity acquired; but contributes to the acquisition, by supplying grace, the primary agent: why is it called by the holy fathers a medicine, unless we are sick? a salve, unless we are wounded? an antidote, unless some poison lurks within us? the fountain of sanctity, if we are saints without it?

Thirdly, Some are so nice, that they forbid the use of the sacrament to those that have an attachment to any venial sin; but this is in soft terms to banish communion out of practice; or at least to confine it to a narrow compass: for how few shall we find, that walk so steady, as not to trip sometimes; that are so fenc'd against temptation, as to have no weak side? so disengag'd from all the pleasures of sense, as always to model their satisfaction by the rule of strict reason? Always to hit upon the point between too much and too little, is a hard task; it requires more than an ordinary prudence, and a greater circumspection, than can be expected from the most numerous part of Christians: so that, if this doctrine be admitted, few would be obliged to obey the precept of the church,
even

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even at Easter ; because her commands must give place to those of God, that forbid to communicate with an attachment to any venial sin : all those therefore, who cannot have a moral certainty they have no such attachment, must not communicate ; and I believe the number of these will prove ten times greater than of the others.

Fourthly, Others pretend, they find no amendment by communicating, and think this a sufficient pretext to abstain : but if you grow not better, is it no profit, not to grow worse ? If a medicine stops a disease, and hinders its malignity from increasing, will a patient refuse the remedy, because it does not restore him to perfect health ? The sacrament is a medicine, as well as nourishment, to the soul ; it gives strength, and, if it abates not our spiritual distempers, it impedes their growth.

This is certainly a great advantage, which they cannot expect, who abandon the use of this sacrament.

But if you perceive no fruit, examine the reason, and remove the obstacle ; but lay not aside the practice. Is your conscience clean, not only from mortal sin, but from a suspicion of mortal sin ? If not, you turn this spiritual food into poison, and the pledge of salvation into the seal of your eternal damnation. Have you a hankering after venial sins ? This does not hinder indeed the whole effect of the sacrament, but deprives you of a great part : it casts you into a languor and weakness, and just entertains life, but infuses not strength and vigour. Do you not come unprepared ? without intention, without reflection ? It is good to get a habit of doing well ; but it is ill to do a good thing out of custom. Do you resolve to aim at perfection in good earnest ? If you do, communicate : for this sacrament is a channel, by which God infuses

fuses grace into the hearts of the faithful ; it presupposes not perfection, but is an efficacious means to obtain it ; but if you receive, without a resolution to correct your faults, and to break off all dangerous engagements, without a desire to tend to perfection, and a purpose to use the means, it is better to abstain.

O my God, let thy holy Sacrament sanctify my soul ; and transfuse life and vigour into this mass of clay, that weighs me down to earth, and hinders my flight to heaven. I ask pardon a hundred times for having so seldom participated of thy body and blood, and for having dared to approach thy holy table with so little devotion, and so great indifference.

GOSPEL of St. Mark, Chap. xvi. Verse

1. *And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him.*

2. *And very early in the morning, the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun.*

3. *And they said among themselves, who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre ?*

4. *(And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away) for it was very great.*

5. *And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment ; and they were affrighted.*

6. *And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted : ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified : he is risen, he is not here : behold the place where they laid him,*

7. *But*

7. *But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter, that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you.*

THE MORAL REFLECTION.

WE have already been entertained with the tragedy of our Saviour's death: he appeared passible, that he might suffer, and by a real death shew'd he was true man. But now we must shift the scene, and represent him in more glorious circumstances, in a state of glory and immortality; conqueror not only of sin, but of death: *Christ being rais'd from the dead, dieth no more, death hath no more dominion over him*, Rom. vi. 9. He dy'd by man's cruelty, but arose from death by his own power: that was an argument of his love, this of his omnipotence; the one of his humanity, the other of his divinity; and both together of a perfect and superabundant redemption.

I intend not to insist upon the circumstances of this glorious mystery, but to suggest some thoughts, to entertain your piety, and move you to a spiritual resurrection.

Our blessed Saviour foretold his sufferings, and particulariz'd almost every circumstance of his death, that his disciples might not be scandaliz'd; but then at the same time he assur'd them of his resurrection the third day, that they might not despond; and told them, that he, who had power to raise himself from death to life, from ignominy to glory, could restore their bodies to a more refin'd life, than that they were afterwards to sacrifice for his sake.

They pass'd their time between hope and fear, and the desire they had to enjoy the presence of their dear Master, increased their impatience: yet, tho' their

their love for him was great, their cowardise was greater; they durst not appear in publick, much less repair to his sepulchre; so that they rather chose to expect the event in secret, than to enquire with hazard.

But three women, who had courage enough to accompany Christ to the cross, had love enough to follow him to the sepulchre: and they prepared perfumes to embalm his dead body. If they were not so happy as to adore him alive, *they brought sweet spices, that they might anoint Jesus.* But a difficulty occur'd in the way, they had no leisure to think of before: *Who shall roll us away the stone?* This put them to a stand, they would not return, yet thought it to no purpose to go on. For how could they enter, unless the stone was removed, and this was a task beyond their strength; *for it was very great.*

But however, tho' their love could not solve the difficulty, they contemned it; and, perchance, reflecting on our Saviour's promise, thought their faith might remove mountains, tho' their arms could not: So that, drawing near, they saw, with no less joy than astonishment, the door open and the stone removed.

Methinks these womens conduct represents to the life those Christians, who would willingly bend all their care to acquire perfection, but startle at the difficulties. They cry out with these pious women, *Who shall roll us away the stone?* Who will remove those rubs that lie in our way to virtue? Nature weighs heavy upon us, ill habits heavier, and the devil throws more weight upon the burthen; the world charms, temptations sollicit, companions drive into disorder. To bear crosses with patience is hard, to seek them impossible. How can flesh and blood remove these incumbrances? For they

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are insupportable: it is difficult to take them away, and impossible to break through them: what a life, to hang continually upon the torture? To live in discord with ourselves? To set one half of us against the other? And to be sure to be conquered, whenever we overcome?

These imaginations scare us from our pious resolutions; and, because we fancy perfection to be a hard purchase, we never pretend to it. But go on as these pious women did, and you will find these obstacles almost removed to your hand; *they saw the stone roll'd away*. You will experience, that self-denial has its pleasure as well as enjoyment, and the names of mortification and crosses are more ungrateful to nature than the things themselves.

I grant indeed, in the beginning these things are distasteful; but this comes from ourselves; we consult, we dispute whether we shall give ourselves up wholly to the government of grace. We will, and we will not; our resolution is weak, the attractives to perfection languishing and feeble: this contest between the superior part of the soul and the body, between nature and grace, raises a civil war within us, and engages in the quarrel all the sensitive faculties on the one side, and all the reasonable on the other. Our heart at the same time would fain enjoy sensual pleasures, without being deprived of spiritual and divine; it would serve Christ, and yet not quite fall out with the world; and because it sees it impossible to reconcile these two desires, and that it can only chuse one, it falls into fits of melancholy, and feels all the pangs of labour and travail: but if, by a firm and efficacious resolution, it would bid adieu to sensual delights, grace would lead it, not only without pain, but even with pleasure, to spiritual ones. The soul,
that

that will serve God with all fidelity, finds difficulty only in deliberating whether she shall abandon herself wholly to his service, and the pain ends so soon as an efficacious resolution begins.

Thus we see, when men are persuaded, the purchase of any thing will turn to their advantage, they busy themselves in the pursuit, not only without torment, but even with a transport of pleasure. Jacob labour'd fourteen years like a slave for his beloved Rachel; he suffered the parching heats of summer, and the nipping frosts of winter, without complaint; the vehemence of his love carried him through all difficulties, and the desire of possessing his beloved object gave wings to time, and pleasure to his labours.

What contentment, then, what satisfaction must a soul feel, wholly devoted to the service of God; that expects for recompence, not a fading beauty, but God himself; and when it is sure this enjoyment will be eternal? But, besides, in the pursuit of temporal things, the success depends not upon our care and industry; we may lay designs with prudence, carry them on with resolution and caution, and, after all, fall short of our expectation. But those, who practise mortification for heaven, cannot miscarry unless they will; it depends not upon exterior contingencies, but upon themselves, assisted by grace, which will not be wanting; so that their reward is infallible as well as eternal, if they betray not their interest and turn enemies to themselves. Seeing therefore the acquisition of heavenly goods is more sure than that of temporal, and the goods themselves beyond all proportion greater, worldly men cannot take so much content in seeking them, as spiritual men in contemning them, nor so much joy in possessing them, as those who lodge their desires and hopes in heaven.

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Did we always long after the fruition of terrestrial objects, and measure our content by the satisfaction of sense, we should, indeed, find no great pleasure in curbing our appetite, and stemming the tide of nature. But it is certain, that, by the practice of virtue, we wean our desires from sensual allurements, and, by the assistance of grace, we turn our inclinations another way. Those things, which before did please us, begin now to breed disgust and surfeit, and we support their presence with as much chagrin, as we bore before their absence; so that we find the way to virtue plained, and the rubs that obstructed our passage removed.

But moreover, it is certain we are bound to serve God; his sovereign dominion over us, and our dependance on him, demand this homage: now can any Christian think a being so great, so just, so good, can oblige us to be miserable? That he has made our duty a misfortune? and our obedience to his commands a burthen? Try, good reader, the experiment; follow for a time the dictates of an upright conscience, the maxims of the gospel; and, if you find not a more solid and more sincere delight, than in the pleasures of sense, I will give you leave to complain, that God treats you more roughly than his other servants.

St. Paul was attack'd on all sides; the Jews conspired with the Gentiles, and the very elements with men, to make him unhappy; he was scourged like a slave, and persecuted like a common enemy of mankind; yet he confesses, that the interior pleasure of his soul drowned all the sufferings of his body; and that he was nearer sinking under the excess of joy, than of torments. *I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation,* 2 Cor. vii. 4.

Add

Add to this the firm persuasion that we are in God's favour, that, though we died this moment, we should expire in grace, and revive to glory in the next; that we have made his law and counsels the rule of our practice, and his perfections the object of our affections. Can a man want consolation, that entertains his thoughts with these considerations? No, they are sufficient to turn thorns into roses, tortures into pleasures, and the rack into a bed of down. Nay, I will affirm, that a Christian with a good conscience, feels a greater joy in the midst of flames, than a prince on the throne with a bad one; for this short reflection (I suffer innocent; I suffer for God; my pain will soon end, my reward never) revives the soul, inspirits, and animates it under the stroke of the ax.

Let me then, dear reader, address to you those words of the angel, *Fear not* those shocking terms, self-denial, mortification, crosses, tribulations, &c. They grate indeed upon the ear, and trouble sense, but will prove pleasing to reason. You follow the steps of Jesus, who was crucify'd: since he bore the cross on his shoulders, it has lost its weight; thorns have no more points, since he was crown'd, nor tears bitterness, since he was pleas'd to weep. He has changed the bitter waters of Marah into sweet refreshing fountains, renouncing of all things into a true possession of our selves, and a generous contempt of pleasures into the greatest delight: *He is risen, he is not here*; he stays no more in the sepulchre; he is risen in glory, invested with omnipotence: with this he will protect and assist you, with that he invites you to do his service: he tells you, that your sufferings, as well as his, shall end in glory and triumph; that those shall not last long, and these for ever. O the dispro-

portion of the toil to the reward! That is momentary, and this eternal.

O how foolishly have I wasted my time! how vainly have I squandered away the precious moments of my life in the pursuit of content! And what have I found but disappointment, but vanity, and vexation of spirit? I was always upon the chace, but could never start it, because I never sought where it dwells. Sometimes I fancied it lodg'd in wealth, sometimes in preferments, and often in sensuality; but alas! I found upon experience, that my hope deceived me, that I embraced a cloud for a substance, an evil for a good, and a real misery under the disguise of happiness! O my God, I acknowledge, the clear vision of thy infinite perfections is my supreme beatitude in the next world, and an intimate union with thee, by a sincere love, my greatest happiness in this. Wean me from all other objects but thyself: remove all difficulties, or (what I most desire) give me grace to surmount them.

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